

WHAT IS THE ANOINTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

To anoint means to apply oil on a person or a thing. From time of old, the anointing has been the means by which God Almighty inducts or puts His servants into offices and commissions or empowers them to carry out the sacred tasks He had assigned to them. By virtue of the anointing, the person or thing becomes fully dedicated to the service of God.

In time of old, God Almighty instructed Moses to make what was then called the holy anointing oil. He gave him directives as to the ingredients and composition of the holy anointing oil according to Exodus chapter 30 verses 22-25. In verses 30–33, Moses was instructed to anoint Aaron and his sons with the holy anointing oil. “Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.” (Exodus 30:22-25) In verse 30–33, God told Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons with the oil as a formal way of consecrating them into the priesthood.

The warning is there given that the oil should not be applied on indiscriminately on just anybody and that anyone who makes any oil like it would be cut off from the congregation. “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.” see also chapter 28 verse 41. In chapter 40:9-16 God told Moses to anoint items used in the temple service as well as Aaron and His sons.

In course of time, the anointing became the mode for installing kings of Israel into their offices. The first king to be so inducted was Saul according to 1 Samuel chapter 9 verses 16 and chapter 10 verse one. Another prominent king of Israel so anointed was David according to 1 Samuel chapter 16 verses 11-13 and Solomon in 1 Kings Chapter 1 verse 39. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him." (Ps. 89: 20) "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul." — 2 Sam. 12: 7.

In 1 Kings Chapter 19 verses 15, 16 Elijah the prophet was instructed to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha as prophet in his stead. “And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” - 1 Kings 19:15-16.

The Bible shows clearly that the anointing with holy oil typified or foreshadowed the anointing with the Holy Spirit, by which the servants of God in the Christian era were empowered to be His legal representatives here on earth. By the gift of the anointing they are able to see and

understand spiritual things as to be competent to testify to the truth of His word. The first person to be so anointed was Jesus Christ for whom a prophecy was made in Psalm 45:7, which St. Paul made reference to in Hebrews 1:9. In Isaiah 61 verses 1-3 which Jesus Christ explained as fulfilling on him, in Luke chapter 4 verses 18-21. John the Baptist, speaking about Jesus Christ stated in Matthew 3:11 stated:

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” And as he stated, Jesus Christ was baptized in River Jordan by John the Baptist; “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17) That is why his name Christ, from the word Christos in Greek and Messiah in Hebrew means anointed one.

It is by virtue of the anointing that Jesus Christ went about dispensing the gospel to the poor and meek, and doing many good works to the glory of God as St. Peter pointed out in Acts chapter 10:38. Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, the spirit of anointing to the apostles.

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you for ever; 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. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” “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.” - John 14: 16, 26, see also John 15:26; 16:13. Just before his ascension, he told them that when the anointing spirit comes, they would be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem but in far flung places. “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)

This fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, the 50th day after the Passover, when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles as cloven tongues of fire and the apostles were given utterance to address the congregation who came for the festival in various languages as stated in Acts 2:1-21. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites,”

There were about 16 different languages spoken by the apostles under the power of the Holy Spirit.

From verse 12, it is written “And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, what meaneth this? Others mocking said, these men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:1-21)

The fact is that the gift of speaking in tongues served the purpose of spreading the gospel to people of other languages other than the Hebrew nation, for the gospel to reach beyond the confines of the Jewish nation. That purpose has been served as there are now Christians in virtually all parts of the world. The gift has now ceased. St. Paul himself stated that the gift will in course of time cease. – 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Apostle Peter explained that what happened on the day of Pentecost was a fulfilment of the prophecy God made through his servant Joel, which fulfilled in the last days of the Jewish era. The text should not be taken literally; else it would mean that all flesh, including animals and birds would have the Holy Spirit. In point of fact, the phrase, all flesh “refers to the anointed Christians because they are men. They are first born sons whose names are written in heaven according to Hebrews 12:23. In the words of Apostle James they a kind of first fruits of God’s creatures. In 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” And in Revelation 14:4 it is written concerning these apostles “These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.”

They are called daughters not because they are women, but because they are spiritually married to Jesus Christ as his bride to bring forth children to God. (Revelation 21:9; 22:17) In 2 Corinthians 11:2 it is written: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” As a wife brings forth children, so the saints also bear children who get converted to the truth by the preaching of the gospel. That was why St. Paul said: “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.” - 1 Corinthians 4:15

The young men means that the saints are strong and vigorous because of the knowledge of God they have. The glory of young men is their strength (Proverbs 20:29) But in their case their strength is spiritual.” “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong

holds)” - 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4 see also Ecclesiastes 7:12.

They are servants to Christ because they are wholly obedient to him and serve him exclusively. (Isaiah 43:10) Like the early apostles, once called they become the Lord’s free man. “For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.” (1 Corinthians 7:22, 23) The apostles once called forsake every secular calling and devote themselves exclusively to the Lord’s service. They live of the gospel. But the apostles we have today work in ministries, or companies. Mark the words of Apostle Paul:” Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.” (1 Corinthians 9:14-17) Compare the case of Simon Peter and Andrew his brother in Mathew 4:18, 19. In the book of Romans chapter one verse, Paul was called to be an apostle separated unto the gospel of God.

That not all the 120 who were in the upper chamber that day of Pentecost in Jerusalem received the anointing is proven by words in verses 13 and 14. “Others mocking said, these men are full of new wine.” (Verse 13) “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.” (Acts 2:14)

The mark of the apostles is the truth which they preach unmixed with lies. They do not have to go to seminaries or higher institutions of the world to understand the Bible. Read 1 John 2:27. That was the case with St. Paul who started preaching after receiving the anointing; he only went to see the apostles before him, three years after his call. (Galatians 1:11, 12, 15-19) But the apostles and saints of today attend seminaries and universities to study the Bible.

Again the anointing cannot be bought with money. These days, pay heavy amounts to Bishops and pastors to be anointed. A leader of one of the denominations collapsed and died as he was anointing so many people who were paying N5000 each. The case of Simon the ex-sorcerer is instructive. He offered money to St. Peter to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and was severely chastised for so doing. (Acts 8:18-24)

Also the position of an anointed servant is not one that anybody hustles for. It is not a position in a hierarchy that man can give to another, or one can aspire to. It is only God who chooses them, and even knows them before they are born. See Romans 8:28-30; Hebrews 5:4; Romans 9:15, 16. Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ;) Galatians 1:1

We thank God that one of the anointed remnant was chosen from this part of the world, in person of St. Gideon Meriodere Urhobo of the blessed and eternal memory. According to his account it was **three and half years' diligent and prayerful studies of the Holy Bible, that Jesus Christ revealed himself to him a vision and commanded him to go and proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom (or 'Gospel of Peace') to all nations as the only remedy for all**

human sufferings and woes; to expose all the false doctrines which Satan had used to deceive the people and to keep them in ignorance of God's Kingdom and purpose of creation; and to pronounce God's written judgment against all wickedness."

Some people make light of this assertion. By virtue of the truth he preached and the works he did, he is indeed an apostle according to the Bible. "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? 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. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, (1 Corinthians 9:1-3)

The anointing spirit is different from the ordinary spirit which God gives to his worshippers. One can pray for that one. (Luke 11:13) And the signs or fruits of the spirit will be seen in such person. (Galatians 5:22, 23) Indeed anyone who does not have the spirit of God is none of his. (Romans 8:9)

SPEAKING IN TONGUE AS SEEN THROUGH THE HOLY BIBLE

The ability to speak in tongues or in languages which one had never learned was one of the gifts which God Almighty used to propagate the gospel in the early days of Christianity.

Due to ignorance, it has become the norm these days for Churches to stake their credibility on their ability to speak in tongues. The Church leaders contend that all Christians must speak, pray or sing in new tongues as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. They contend that speaking in tongues gives one a "hotline to heaven" and that such prayer cannot be "intercepted" by the devil. So strong is the obsession with speaking in tongues otherwise known as *glossolalia* that even new converts to these Churches are these days being taught how to speak in tongues! Instead of saying what people can understand, what they utter are, as the *Blacks Bible Dictionary* puts it, nothing but "inarticulate, unintelligible speech, meaningless sounds, jargon ..." — page 768

Origin

Religious historians agree that the practice of speaking in tongues is an ancient one. According to *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* speaking in tongues has been practiced through the ages in various religious settings, both Christian and non Christian, by individuals in private as well as by whole communities. It states: "Practitioners of ancient pagan religions believed that speaking in tongues was a sign of the active presence of the gods. Thus whenever the oracle of Delphi became inspired, she would speak in tongues as an evidence of supernatural illumination." The authors add: "This interpretation of glossolalia as divine activity has been accepted (by people) as diverse as medieval mystics, Huguenot sectarians and oriental religionists such as the Moslem Dervishes." (Volume 4 1997 edition page 2076) Other practitioners of the art are said to include the Jansenists, the Camisard of Cevennes, the Irvingites, and during American revivals of the

frontier days. “It may still be seen at meetings of Pentecostals, Holy Rollers, and other highly emotional groups.” –
Page 768.

However, the type of “speaking in tongues” practised in these religious groups as pointed out in *Blacks Bible Dictionary* is no more than “a flow of unintelligible sounds that transcend the usual processes of verbal communication”. It adds “Because the sounds uttered do not constitute intelligible language, they need interpretation (not translation) in order to be of use to the hearers.” Evidently what the Pentecostals now call “speaking in tongues” is akin to what the pagans were practising in their ancient religions.

Wrong Views

One of the Scriptures some religious groups cite as their authority for the teaching that God is still moving people to speak tongues in these last days is Mark 16:17, 18. It says: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 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” Commenting on this text, Ellen G. White states in his book, *Desire of Ages*”. The disciples were to preach among other nations, and they would receive power to speak other tongues. The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers to the end of time.” (Pages 810 – 811) However, people who take this as their authority ignore verse 20 which says: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word with signs following.** Amen.” This shows that the signs Jesus spoke of has already fulfilled. It should be understood that this was intended to boost the growth of the Church in her infancy and it served the purpose for which it was intended as shown also by the words of Apostle Peter, to wit: “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:12,14-16. See also Acts 19:11, 12.

Pentecost

The major point referred to those who claim to speak in tongues today is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost. On that day, the Apostles of Jesus Christ received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This was a fulfilment of the promise of Jesus Christ to send the Holy Spirit which he also called the Comforter, the Teaching Spirit or the Spirit of Truth. (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:5, 9). The Pentecost is held 50 days after the Passover, the time of Christ’s crucifixion. It commemorates the old Jewish festival of First Fruits and, according some authorities, is also kept by the Jews in remembrance of the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai. (See *The Lions Handbook to the Bible* page 551, *The Illustrated National Holy Bible* [commentary])

While the disciples were assembled waiting for the fulfillment of the promise which Jesus Christ had given them there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and there alighted on the apostles cloven tongues of fire as a result of which they “began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance”.

The account further states: “And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” Acts 2:1-16

It is clear from the foregoing that contrary to what obtains in the pagan religions and among the Churches today, the audience understood what the apostles were saying on the day of Pentecost as they spoke in the hearers’ own languages.

That only 12 men, the apostles, received the anointing spirit of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day is an indisputable fact. It is also worthy to note that no female disciple spoke in tongues, as seen from what some of the eyewitnesses mockingly said of the Apostles “These men are full of new wine.” (Verse 13) The prophecy of Joel the prophet fulfilled on the day of Pentecost on the Apostles of Jesus Christ who were the foundation members of the Anointed Christians who constitute the body members of Christ. They are called “Daughters of Zion” (Zechariah 9:9); “Sons of God” (1 John 3: 2) “Virgins” (Revelation 14:1-5) However the gift of speaking in tongues, has ceased because it was not meant to last beyond the early stage of Christianity. It was useful during the establishment of the early Church. After a while it ceased. Said St. Paul: “Whether there be tongues they shall cease” – 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Some professed Christians contend that it is wrong to relegate the relevance of the gift of speaking in tongues to the apostolic age on the basis of 1 Corinthians 13:8 “whether there be tongues, they shall cease” insisting that the gift was meant to last for ever. They argue further that if such interpretation were true, then St. Paul’s other statement, also in verse 8, “whether there be knowledge they shall vanish away” (verse 8) would also mean that “knowledge was valid only for the apostles time.” *Baker Encyclopaedia of the Bible* – volume 4 1997 edition edited by Walter A. Elwell. This argument is valid. What St. Paul was saying was that speaking in tongues and the craving for knowledge will be only for a time. As earlier indicated, the phase of speaking in tongues has ended with the early Church. The quest for knowledge will also end as perfection comes in God’s kingdom. In God’s Kingdom there will be no need for teachers, as all would have knowledge of God. God said: “And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Hebrews 8:11; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34). The prophet Isaiah further stated: The

earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9). On this score we agree with William Smith L.L.D. that the “gifts of the day of Pentecost belonged to a critical epoch, not to the continuous life of the Church.” - *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (January 1999 edition)

Gifts of Spirit

The Holy Bible clearly shows that speaking in tongues is one of several gifts of the Spirit which God gives to His worshippers. St. Paul enumerated some of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-12. In verses 28-31, he showed that as there are different offices and spiritual gifts in the church so are the believers endowed with diverse gifts (1 Corinthians 12:13) the apostle further said: “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” – 1 Corinthians 7:7.

Emphasising the superior merits of the gifts of charity and expounding of the truth to the understanding of the believers, St. Paul placed speaking in tongues at the bottom of a list of gifts of the Holy Spirit arranged by decreasing order of importance. (1 Corinthians 12: 28; 1 Corinthians 13: 1, 3-5, 13) The manifestation of the spirit of God in one is not by speaking in tongues but by the fruits of the new man character and behaviour change that are seen in the person.

St. Paul did not recommend speaking in tongues as a gift to be coveted by believers. He made it clear that it is not an indispensable element of Christian worship as it was unprofitable to speak in tongues which the audience could not understand. He said: “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (1 Corinthians 14:19-23). As St. Paul so aptly observed, anyone seeing the rowdy spectacle of several people babbling some incomprehensible gibberish as is common with some Churches today, will not fail to reach the same conclusion as St. Paul.

It is an indisputable fact of the Scriptures ended with the early Church and that it is not a requirement for salvation. Speaking in tongues is not a badge of spirituality or piety and therefore should not be boastfully paraded as such. The principal mark of a true servant of God is the preaching and practice of the Truth not ability to speak in tongues. - Proverbs 14:5, 25; John 8:31, 32.

ARE CHRISTIANS TO PERFORM MIRACLES IN THIS AGE?

That the world today is in danger of miracle-mongers who claim to be prophets of God is a fact which no one can gainsay. At street corners, crusades night vigils, and at various revival assemblies, members of the public are daily accosted with giant posters and proclamations persuading them to come for deliverance from afflictions, barrenness, joblessness, poverty, business failure, yokes and burdens and so on.

An advert for a crusade ran thus: "The doors of heaven will (be) opened...the sick will be healed, broken marriages will come together again and thieves will bring back things they have stolen"! - *National Post* February 23, 2001, page 2.

So great is the obsession with miracles that churches are now competing with one another in

laying claims to miracle cures to prevent their members from flooding to so called "living" churches. In Britain members of the Anglican Church have openly confessed that they are desperately seeking for miracles to keep their adherents within their fold. A story with the headline "Churches in Britain Starved of Miracles" carried in *The Guardian on Sunday* of June 18, 2000 at page 23 reported that "Christendom in Britain has expressed worry on the shortage of miracles there these days..." Quoting a 400 page report entitled "*A Time to Heal*", which spoke of the popularity of Christian healing centres such as Lourdes and Walsingham, the newspaper report disclosed that most parishes held regular services with "laying on of hands" and "prayers for healing" and that each of the 43 dioceses in Britain had its own adviser on healing and deliverance with ordained clergymen or women occasionally called to carry out exorcisms.

It was the same misconceived idea that religious leaders can do miracles today that informed the Pope's attempt to cast out a demon from a girl by sheer command as reported in the London *Daily Telegraph* website of April 2000. The Pope's inability to cast out the demon which incident occurred during a general audience in a packed St Peter's Square, was reported in an Italian newspaper the *Il Messaggero* in a story headlined: "Devil defeats the Pope in Vatican exorcism battle". According to the story, reported by Bruce Johnston in Rome, "Despite the Pope's efforts and those of his chief 'Satan-buster', Fr Gabriele Amorth," to carry out what was called an 'impromptu exorcism' on an unnamed 19-year-old girl from Monza "the girl remained 'possessed' by the devil."

There is no doubt that those seeking miracles from men, whether in Britain or elsewhere are in ignorance of the purpose of God. Instead of doing works of righteousness so that God may have mercy on them, they are looking for miracles. Space constraints will not permit us to dilate on the degeneration in spiritual life of people in Europe such that many Church buildings now serve as tourist attractions while many have been converted to libraries, museums schools, and even pubs (drinking houses). The appalling situation made the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey to lament that the Church in Britain is "now one generation away from extinction." (*Newsweek* July 12, 1999, page 48) Jesus Christ told the scribes and Pharisees when they requested for signs: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonah..." (Matthew 12: 38-40)

Stage-managed miracles are rife in Nigeria. This is because the people's quest for miracles (rather than the truth) is so intense. When a German evangelist, Reverend Reinhard Bonnke, went to Calabar for a crusade it was reported that patients deserted hospitals for the crusade grounds in the hope of receiving healing. (Vide *The Guardian* January 27, 2000 page 1) There is no record of any of them being healed. When no fewer than 14 persons died following a stampede at his crusade ground in Benin City, the so-called miracle worker could not bring any of them back to life as St. Paul did in the case of Eutychus (Acts 20: 7-12) One of the victim's family instituted a N60 million suit against the German Evangelist and his colleagues who insisted that the human traffic accident did not occur at their crusade grounds as was inferred but occurred while the people affected were going home. (*Vanguard* October 12, 1999, pages 1, 2)

False Prophets

Those who go about advertizing in show business style their prowess in making miracles always

cite the promise of Jesus Christ to his disciples: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 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: 17) But the truth which cannot be wished away is that these signs promised by the Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled. This is evident in verse 20: **"And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."** (See also Hebrews 2: 2-4) The miracles were done to establish the Church which was then in its infancy, after which the gift ceased. The miracles done by Jesus Christ and later his apostles foreshadowed what God will do in far greater measure in His kingdom fully established, when people will not have disabilities of any sort. - Isaiah 13: 12; 1 Corinthians 15: 37,38,42,43

Another text which miracle workers frequently cite to support their claims is John 14:12-14 in which Jesus Christ told his disciples to wit: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" Jesus Christ was not talking about miracles in that text as even a cursory reading of the Synoptic gospels and the Acts would show that the Disciples of Christ never did greater miracles that he did. The primary mission of Jesus Christ was to preach the gospel (Luke 4:43) And for the three and half years of his ministry, he concentrated primarily on the Jews. (Matthew 10: 5; 15: 26,27) What Jesus Christ meant was that his disciples would cover far more ground, reach many more nations and do the work of dispensing the gospel for a far longer period than he did. - Luke 24:45-47; Acts 1:8

God knowing that the devil mimics every aspect of His work, has made it clear in the scriptures that the test or proof of true discipleship in these last days will not be the performance of miracles but the ability to interpret the scriptures and dispense the truth which if people believe and practice, will lead them to salvation. - 1 John 2: 27; John 8: 31,32; 1 Timothy 2: 3,4; etc

Lying Wonders

That people could falsely claim to be sent by God or Jesus Christ should not come as a surprise to anyone. Jesus Christ warned: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7: 21) He further stated: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7: 22, 23. See also Revelation 13: 11-14; 19: 20) it was for this reason Jesus Christ warned Christians to beware of false prophets whose stock-in-trade is the making of miracles. He declared: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." - Matthew 24:11, 24

St. Paul, knowing the tendency of the Devil and his agents to sail under false colours, claiming to belong to Christ, warned Christians against "false apostles, deceitful workers" who transform "themselves into the apostles of Christ." He added: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be

transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." - 2 Corinthians 11: 13-15

Furthermore, St. John was used by God to expose the loud, noisy (but empty) character of these false prophets to wit: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16: 13-14) The three unclean "spirits of devils" came out of the mouth of the dragon, thus showing their true character. (Matthew 12: 34) The devil makes much noise, is boastful and arrogant. He is the very fountain head of boasting and lies. His agents also mouth great swelling words and make boastful claims. They relate and compromise with the political and commercial giants of the world, using miracles as tools. Ultimately, God will destroy the devil, miracle workers and their associates. (Matthew 15:12-14; Isaiah 9:16; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4) St. Paul also stated that Satan will use his agents to intensify the doing of signs and wonders in these last days as it is written, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: **Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,** And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thessalonians 2: 8-12) Look around and you will find that bombast, noise-making and the penchant for fantastic claims are at the very heart of the so called healing ministries in Nigeria and different parts of the world. What should be understood therefore is that Satan's agents can do miracles, but they can never preach the truth. It is the truth that men of goodwill should strive for, not miracles. (John 8: 44; 1 Timothy 6: 5; 1 Timothy 2: 3,4; John 8: 31,32)

True healing

It must be made clear that God, having enthroned His Son Jesus Christ in heaven at this end of the world, is healing His people Himself, in fulfilment of His promise and not through human agents any longer. This is manifest in the declaration through the prophet Malachi: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (Malachi 4:2) God further promised that in this Kingdom age He will bring unto his people "health and cure" and reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." (Jeremiah 33:6 See also Isaiah 35: 1-10) While the sick and afflicted in the Church can go to the elders of the true Church for prayers, which God will answer in His time. (James 5: 13-15) credit should not be given to any man as having any special power to heal or do miracles. **It is deceit of the first order for any one to claim he has special power to do miracles and thus invite people to come to him for cures.** Such people, by their actions, make the way of truth to be evil spoken of. They are not sent by God. -Isaiah 52:5; Romans 2: 24; 2 Peter 2: 1-4; 2 Corinthians 2: 17.

It must be emphasized that it is not every ailment among the people of God that will be cured now. That would only be in God's kingdom. (Isaiah 33: 24) A ready instance is that of St. Paul who three times prayed God to heal him of his sickness but God told him: "My grace is sufficient for thee..."- 2 Corinthians 12: 9

From the foregoing it is evident that the miracles which present day pastors and evangelists are proclaiming do not come from Christ. Such miracle workers are only advertising themselves to be the agents of the devil as prophesied in the Holy Bible. It is the truth preached in God's holy organisation, of which God's Kingdom Society is a part and parcel that will lead to salvation in God's Kingdom where there will be no more sickness, disability or deformity of any sort. - Isaiah 33: 24; 13:12; 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42, 43.

DOES THE BIBLE SUPPORT THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AS PASTORS?

The trend among the Churches today is to ordain women as pastors. The practice has become so widespread that in several Churches, including the orthodox ones, female ordination is now largely regarded as a non issue. But since prevalence of a practice does not give validity to it, (Luke 16:15) there is critical need for an objective assessment of the issue in the light of the Scriptures.

In regard to the spread of women ordination, a study by the Hartford Seminary in the United States shows that the number of clergywomen in 15 large denominations has skyrocketed within two decades. Between 1977 and 1997, the number of women in the American Baptist Church has increased from 157 to 712; in the Episcopal Churches in USA from 94 to 1394; in the United Methodist Church from 319 to 3003. (*The Guardian* October 28, 2001, page 31) Here in Nigeria the number of female pastors is daily on the rise. One of the female pastors in Nigeria founded a ministry named *Singles and Married* which “focuses on marriage and relationships.” (*The Comet*, Sunday July 23, 2000 page 13) Are all these women acting according to the will of God?

First, let us examine the position of the man and the woman in God's order of things. God Almighty being a God of order (1 Corinthians 14: 33, 40), made man in his own image and likeness and placed the man in a preeminent position among His creatures on earth. But man sinned by disobeying God. In passing His sentence, God told Eve: “...and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3:16) And in line with this St. Paul declared: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” -1Corinthians 11:3.

Now let us look into the cases of women who were called prophetesses in the Bible. Miriam was called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. But what did she do? She only led the women of Israel with timbrels and dances after the crossing of the Red Sea. When she claimed to be God's mouthpiece, God made it clear that she was being presumptuous as it is written: "And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses ...And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it. And he (the Lord) 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.**" (Numbers 12:1-6). Miriam was punished for her presumptuousness while Aaron, who later became a High Priest of God, was spared because he was indeed called by God. - Numbers 12:9-16.

There is also the case of the woman Deborah as it is written: "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead. And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." Deborah was never ordained by God as a prophet and she never said so. It should be noted that Deborah did not call even herself a prophetess but a "mother in Israel" who uttered a song. It was Barak that led the assault on the enemy and led "captivity captive". - Judges 5:7, 12

The woman Huldah, who was wrongly referred to as a "prophetess" is another example. She only came into play at the time the Jews had sold themselves to false religion. The degeneration was such that the law book of God, through which the people should know their left from their right, was not found until about the 18th year of King Josiah's reign! It was because of spiritual decline that the Jews had to go to Huldah for advice. (2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chronicles 34:8-25) Huldah, after referring to the pronouncements of woe on Judah recorded in the Scripture, then went to make a prophecy of her own - which turned out to be false, thus exposing her true colour. "And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again" (2 Kings 22: 15,20; 2 Chronicles 34: 22-29). But this was not the case as Josiah died violently in the hands of Pharaoh Nechoh King of Egypt, having obviously been emboldened by the false prophecy of Huldah. (2 Kings 23: 28-30; 2 Chronicles 35: 20-24)The Bible says: "The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him." - Jeremiah 28:9.

Some cite the case in Acts 21:9 where it is written that Phillip the evangelist "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." The word "prophesy" is old English for preaching the word of God. It is derived from the Greek verb *propheteuo* and is used with the primary meaning of "telling forth the divine counsels" or "foretelling the future" (*VINES COMPLETE EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT WORDS*) The Hebrew word for prophesy is *naba* and according to *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* of the Holy Bible the word means to "speak (or sing) by inspiration in prediction **or simple discourse**." (page 89) This was what the woman Anna did. And just because of that she was referred to as a prophetess by the translators! (Luke 2: 36-38) What a blunder! It goes without saying that the understanding of Acts 21:9 about the four daughters of Phillip the evangelist who "prophesied" is that they preached or discoursed the word of God, in this case to fellow women.

That one is the wife of a prophet, like the case of Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), or sings the praises of God does not make her a prophetess. According to *Vines Concordance* the word "prophetess", derived from the Hebrew word *nabi* is related to the meaning "a companion and/or follower of a prophet." (page 89) One does not require advanced knowledge of the Scriptures to know that merely being a companion or follower of a prophet or engaged in singing or discoursing the word of God does not qualify one to be called a prophet.

It was not even the custom of God's true worshippers for women to lead them. When at certain times in the history of the Jews they were led by women, the Bible did not fail to point out that this was a period of degeneration or decline in their devotion to God. Hence Isaiah the prophet recorded this lamentation in Isaiah 3:12: "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and

women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.' In fact St Paul makes it clear that an effeminate (womanish man) will not enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because he is unable to exercise his authority as head of the woman. The law in Genesis 3:16 is clear, "...And he shall rule over thee."

The prophets of God by virtue of the anointing are able to see and understand spiritual things and are thus competent to testify to the truth of His word. By the standard laid down in Numbers 12:6, any prophet of God MUST see the vision of God Almighty, hear his voice so that as St Peter said, he will testify of the things he has seen and heard. (Acts 4:20) God has not revealed himself to any woman. He has never ordained any woman to be His mouthpiece as He did to Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, St. Paul etc. Concerning the ordination of Jeremiah God declared, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5) Where in the Scriptures has God spoken to a woman in this wise? - Ezekiel 3:17.

Early Church

During the time of Christ he sent only men to preach to the people. First he chose the 12 apostles. Here is Mark's account: "And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. **And he ordained** twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he named them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder ..." (Mark 3:13-19. See also Luke 6:12, 13) Later he chose seventy disciples, all men, "and sent them out two by two to preach..." - Luke 10:1

The same precedent was also followed at the replacement of Judas Iscariot when the apostles declared: "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:21) On the day of Pentecost, only the 12 apostles received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Hence these statements: "**These men** are full of new wine..." and "**St. Peter, standing up with the eleven...**" Acts 2:13, 14.

Role of women

There are many things women can do in support of the work of God. Women can preach to fellow women. St. Paul charged thus: "The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; **that they may teach the young women** to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands that the word of God be not blasphemed..." (Titus 2:3-5) Women can give material and moral support to the progress of the work of God. That was the case in the time of Jesus. The woman Mary Magdalene took a pound of very precious ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus Christ commended her for the work she did saying she did it for his burial and added: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matthew 26: 6-13) The

Bible also shows that such women as "Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joana the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, **ministered unto Christ of their substance.** (Luke 8:3) Of course the women could not have been preaching to Jesus Christ. Rather, they supported the work with material things. It was in this sense that St. Paul charged the Church in Philippi to "help those women which labored with me in the gospel" - Philippians 4:3.

We cannot wish away the following express commands of God from the Holy Bible. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." St. Paul concluded that we should "acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1Corinthians 14:34-35, 37) The law being referred to by St. Paul is the law of God in Genesis 3:16: "And he shall rule over thee..." Commenting on 1Corinthians 14: 34, 35 **Barnes states as follows: "The rule is positive, explicit and universal. ...on every consideration it was improper, and to be expressly prohibited, for women to conduct the devotions of the church. . No rule in the New Testament is more positive than this, and however plausible may be the reasons for disregarding it, and for suffering women to take part in conducting public worship, yet the authority of the apostle Paul is positive, and his meaning cannot be mistaken"**

Contrary to the argument of certain people, this law by St. Paul was not for a time but for all time. If God wanted it only for a short time, he would have caused such to be recorded in the Holy Bible.

St. Paul further declares "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." - 1 Timothy 2: 11-15

From the preceding text it is evident that the Bible does not support the ordination of women as priests. Therefore those women who claim to see visions are seeing nothing but visions from Satan the devil and are in danger of God's judgment. Said God Almighty, "The prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die." - Deuteronomy 18: 20.

These female Bishops and pastors now parading themselves as "anointed women pastors" should repent of their sins and stop their presumptuous acts and practices through which they work against God's purpose and bring reproach to His Holy name. One cannot fail to highlight the following warning to the Church at Thyatira for allowing a certain woman called Jezebel to preach in the Church. "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children (in this context her companions and followers) with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you

according to your works." - Revelation 2:20-22

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

The question as to whether one continues to live after death has engaged the minds of men across the ages. Attempts to provide satisfactory answers to this all-important question have all met with failure as men have ended up being drawn more and more into the Devil's web of confusion and lies. We thank God that it has pleased Him to illuminate, through His word, what some have called "this dark subject."

Life means the state of being alive as a human being; the power of existence. The Almighty God **Jehovah** is the Source of life. He is the Creator; all others are creatures. - Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17:24-26.

Death, which is the cessation of life, is to the living, a distressing experience to which man was reduced because of sin. But what happens to man when he dies? Does he have an immortal soul such that he continues to live after death in one form or another? If not, what is the fate of man after death? These are some of the questions that we shall address in this sermon.

Diverse Beliefs

Many people in the world believe that "death is not the end of human existence but a change of place or condition in which conscious existence continues". The Egyptians of old believed that "after death man would continue to live exactly as on earth, provided that a large supply of food, drink, and representations of servants be placed in the tomb to serve the soul as they had the man, and provided that the body was well preserved through embalming and mummification." They also believed that "the body as well as the soul, persisted in the hereafter, but the soul would not recognize the body unless it had escaped decomposition. The soul was believed to take the form of a bird, which after the death of the body, flew at will through the world, yet could also return to the tomb." – *Black's Bible Dictionary*, page 131.

Prevalent in the many forms of Hinduism, in Buddhism, and also in the works of Plato, is the belief in Transmigration (or Metempsychosis) - the rebirth of the soul in one of many other forms such as lower animals and even in insects, trees and other plants. "According to some transmigrationists, if one has been cruel to lower animals in this life, in the next life he will reappear as a lower animal and may experience like treatment. If one kills an insect, he may reappear as an insect." Vide *The American Educator Encyclopedia*, page 164

Several of the world's religions, including Traditional African Religion, believe in *Reincarnation*, which is the "rebirth of the soul in another body". In an article entitled "Reincarnation Is a Truth of Life" carried at page 15 of *The Guardian on Sunday* of November

15, 1998, Mr. Wale Akande, quoted the book "*Life After Life*" by Dr. Raymond A. Moody Jr., as containing case histories of people who claim to have had "out of body experience" such that they were able to see their own bodies on the sick bed or theatre table. Arguing that the spirit of a dead person returns to earth at some stage and takes up residence in someone else, often a member of the same family, he adds: "Reincarnation happens midway during pregnancy... when the pregnant woman feels the first movement of the foetus in her womb. After the birth of the one who has taken the body, the person could live for a period on earth, and shed the body, i.e. die. If he/she is given the chance of coming back to earth, he/she will pass through the same natural process of birth, either in the same family or in a different one."

Mr. Akande quoted Luke 8 verse 55 and 1 Corinthians 15:44-49 to reinforce his argument on reincarnation insisting that "there is difference between body and spirit". We must point out that the portions quoted do not support reincarnation. In Luke 8, verse 41-42, 49 to 56, we read of the raising back to life of the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. At Jesus' command, the Bible says that "her spirit came again, and she arose straightway..." The "spirit" that came back to her is not a living entity that was existing somewhere but "the breath of life", also called soul in 1 Samuel 24:11; 26:21; "life" in 1 Samuel 23:15; 26:4; Genesis 1:20,30; "breath of life" in Genesis 7:15, 22; "breath", Job 12:10; Psalm 104:29; and "spirit" in Job 34: 14,15; Psalm 104:30. It is the same breath of life that operates in both man and beast. (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21) In 1 Corinthians 15:44, St. Paul made a distinction between the earthly or terrestrial and the celestial or heavenly bodies and spoke of how they (the apostles) will be changed from earthly to spiritual beings and be taken to heaven. There is nothing in that passage we repeat that supports reincarnation.

Writing at page 320 of his book *CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*, Walter Thomas Conner speaks of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, which he says is "a state of consciousness both for the wicked and the righteous." He adds that the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is not meant to teach that at death the righteous are in a state of unconsciousness, but that, compared with the turmoil and strife of this life, it is a condition of rest and peace, a "state of conscious fellowship with the Lord." Still basing his argument on the same text, another writer Bishop D. A. Thompson adds that "at death the spirit of the believer passes from the body, guarded and carried by angels through the air" to heaven. He states further that after the death of the body, the immaterial spirit of man lives on eternally, in full consciousness of happiness or misery..." (*THE BELIEVER AT AND AFTER DEATH*, page 5) It is because of such beliefs that obituary announcements are being substituted with such misleading expressions as "Transition" and "Call to Eternal Glory" while prayers such as "Eternal Rest Grant him O Lord", "Rest In Peace" (*RIP*) are made for the dead who are said to have "passed on".

We must point out that the story of Lazarus and the Rich man is a parable and so should not be interpreted literally. The parable tells of the blessedness that will be the lot of the humble, sincere children of God who seek God's help (as shown by the name *Lazarus*) and, after God would have gathered His sheep into His fold by the truth, the shame, weeping and gnashing of teeth and eventual destruction which await all unrepentant false prophets (symbolized as the rich man) when their falsehood would have been exposed. These false prophets deceive the people and feed them with crumbs (lies) rather than the truth. (Jeremiah 16:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Jeremiah 5:27-31; Matthew 15:7-14; Zechariah 13:4-6) The parable did not even say Lazarus was taken to heaven but to "Abraham's bosom", which means God's side of favour. (Isaiah

41:8; Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:7-9,16) How could Lazarus had gone to heaven when Jesus Christ had not opened the way to heaven by his ransom sacrifice? He himself declared: **“and no man had ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven.”** -John 3:13.

The Bible shows that those who will go to heaven started from the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ and **Abraham is not among them.** (Luke 6:12, 13; 22:28-30; Hebrews 11:32-40) However, Abraham, and other ancient worthies including John the Baptist, will be among the rulers in God’s Kingdom here on earth. (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28, 29) Hence Jesus Christ declared: **“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”**

The “Kingdom of heaven” in the text under reference means God’s Kingdom in heaven, not the entire universal Kingdom of God covering the heavens and the earth. The argument of some that the reference is to God’s Kingdom generally is therefore spurious else it would mean that John the Baptist as well as all those before him approved for salvation will not inherit God’s Kingdom.

Ye shall not surely die?

The basis of the erroneous belief in life after death is the teaching that the soul continues to live after the person had died. This was the Devil’s argument with which he deceived Eve. God gave Adam the law in Genesis 2:16, 17 to wit: “...Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” But the Devil in the guise of a serpent deceived Eve by saying “Ye shall not surely die” – in other words she shall not die (Genesis 3:4). **THIS IS THE FIRST AND ONE OF THE MOST HEINOUS LIES THAT HAS BEEN FOISTED ON MANKIND BY THE DEVIL** hence Jesus Christ called him “the father of lies”. (John 8:44) It is highly unfortunate however that rather than believe God Almighty, people prefer to follow the Devil.

It is not true; we must reiterate that the soul is an “entity which is regarded as being the immortal or spiritual part of the person”. When God created man, he did not infuse any other thing into him other than the breath of life, as it is written: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) From this text it is evident that a “living soul”, that is, man, is composed of the dust of the ground and the breath of life. When man disobeyed the perfect law of God in the garden of Eden God Almighty passed the sentence of death on him as it is written: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:19. See also Romans 5:12; 6:23) Since the fall of man, all mankind have been born in sin and are therefore subject to death. Hence St. Paul declared: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23; see also Psalm 51:5) God declared through the prophet Ezekiel thus: “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die” -Ezekiel 18:4, 20. See also Psalm 89:48.

Some argue that it is only the body that dies while the spirit or breath of life continues to live.

But the breath of life is not a conscious being that could exist of itself. It is the power of God which animates all creatures on earth. When it leaves one, the organs cease to function. In that sense it is like electricity which when switched on, energizes machines and modern appliances generally. Otherwise, the gadget or machine will remain dead or useless.

In Ecclesiastes 12:7 King Solomon made a declaration that the dust shall return to the earth as it was “and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it”. This does not mean that each person has a soul specific to him or that God has a place He keeps the souls of the dead or even that the soul continues to live after death. The breath of life returns to God in the sense that once it leaves the creature it goes back into the air, which is under the control of God Almighty. It also means that God who gave the man life (Genesis 2:7) has caused or allowed it to cease. In other words God takes account of each person that dies... – Matthew 10: 29-31. Romans 14:7-10; Job 34:14, 15; Psalm 104:29,30.

From the vision of the valley of dry bones, it is evident that the breath of life is present in the air. In the vision, God asked the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath to come not from heaven but from “the four winds”, as it is written: “Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.” - Ezekiel 37: 9, 10

In Job 7:9-10 it is written: “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.” This directly contradicts the false doctrines which say the dead are conscious and that they come back to be reborn several times. If the dead are reborn, then who reincarnated into Cain and Abel?

Witch of Endor

The case of the witch of Endor who is purported to have raised up Samuel is often quoted as proof that one continues to live after death and so could be contacted through appropriate mediums. In 1 Samuel 28:3-25 it is recorded that King Saul went at night in disguise with only two servants to seek help from the witch of Endor. He knew that witchcraft is an abomination to God and His people hence God Almighty commanded “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” - Exodus 22:18; see also Deuteronomy 18: 11; 1 Samuel 28:3-25; Isaiah 8: 19, 20.

That Saul fell prey to the tricks of Satan the Devil is evident in verse 13 of the chapter under reference when he asked “what sawest thou?”, to which the woman replied, “I saw gods ascending out of the earth.” How could Samuel whom Saul asked for turn to be gods? It is certain that the “gods” being referred to are demons who of course are in league with witches and wizards. King Saul went on to ask in verse 14: “What form is he of?” To this, the witch replied: “An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle.” The witch did not even identify whom she saw to be Samuel. The passage says: “Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.” In other words Saul had to draw his own conclusions as to what the witch claimed to have seen.

Worthy of note is verse 15 which says: “And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me,

to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and **GOD IS DEPARTED FROM ME, AND ANSWERETH ME NO MORE, NEITHER BY PROPHETS, NOR BY DREAMS:** therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.” In the following verse the demon who impersonated Samuel asked: “Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, **and is become thine enemy?**” The question now arises: If by Saul’s own admission God has departed from him and is become his enemy and “does not answer him by prophets nor by dreams”, is it from witches that Saul will receive answer from God? Any discerning mind can see from the story that what transpired between Saul and the witch was under the influence of the Devil and so nothing about it should be associated with God. We cannot agree more with a Bible scholar who said: “But to think that God, who had denied a man the benefit of his own institutions, would suffer him to reap any real advantage by a cursed diabolical invention, was very absurd.” – *Matthew Henry’s commentary* (on 1 Samuel 28).

The Dead Unconscious

The Bible makes it clear that the dead are unconscious. Thus the argument of Robert Ervin Hough at page 30 of his book, *THE CHRISTIAN AFTER DEATH* that “Death is not a state of sleep and insensibility” is false. David the Psalmist exhorted: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. **His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.**” (Psalm 146:3,4) What is more the prophet Solomon stated: “For the living know that they shall die: **but the dead know not any thing,** neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. **Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.**” - Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10; see also Psalm 6:5; 115:17; Isaiah 38:18,19.

Resurrection

The dead will remain silent and unconscious in the grave until the time of resurrection, which is the act of God Almighty in bringing the dead back to life. It is for the purpose of securing for man the privilege of resurrection that Christ came, died and rose again. Resurrection is the basis of the Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 15: 12-22)

Thousands of years ago, Job, a prophet of God declared: “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (Job 14:13) He then posed the question: “**IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?**” He followed up with the answer. “**ALL THE DAYS OF MY APPOINTED TIME WILL I WAIT, TILL MY CHANGE COME.**” (Job 14:14, 15) The “change” spoken of by Job is the resurrection. The period Job must wait “until his change comes” is the period of death. In other words the dead must wait in the grave until the resurrection. (Job 17:13-16). This contrasts with reincarnation, transmigration and similar teachings which imply a continuous life which never really ceases.

It is evident therefore that there is no immaterial part of man that at death “is truly conscious, and

is either in great happiness (in heaven) or awful woe (or hell fire)". John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* speaks of people arriving in heaven after they have died, and being welcomed at the gates by St. Peter and others. This is sheer fantasy. Apart from the saints who are changed into spirits and taken into heaven during this age of Christ's second presence, the rest of the human race who will be saved will dwell in God's Kingdom here on earth in perfect peace and happiness. The earth, the Bible says God has given "to the children of men." -Psalm 115:16.

Moreover Christ declared that all who are to be resurrected will come from the grave – not some from heaven, others from hell fire and so on. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, IN THE WHICH ALL THAT ARE IN THE GRAVES shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." - John 5:28-29.

From all we have said in this sermon, it is evident that one does not continue to live after death. The dead will only live again at the resurrection. St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews asserted "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27) This statement is a clear, unambiguous and categorical repudiation of the teaching that life continues to exist after death, presupposing multiple births and deaths. The judgment being referred to by St. Paul is the judgment of the dead, which shall take place at the resurrection.

Furthermore the Bible says "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." -Hosea 13:14 See also Acts 24:15; Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19 etc.

We must emphasize that because "it is appointed unto men once to die" Christians are enjoined to make full use of the time they now have to do the will of God so as to be counted worthy to live in God's Kingdom fully established by God's grace and power. – Ephesians 5:16; Amos 8:11-14; Isaiah 55:6; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5.

IS THERE ANYTHING LIKE HOLY GHOST FIRE IN THE BIBLE?

Instead of carefully scrutinizing what they have been taught in the light of the Scriptures, many professed Christians today allow themselves to be carried away by every wind of doctrine as long as such appear to satisfy their immediate emotional and material concerns. One of such doctrines is the teaching that there is something like “holy ghost fire” which can be invoked to destroy one’s enemies or whatever obstacles that may lie in one’s way.

Some seekers-after-truth have been asking whether this teaching is supported by the Scriptures. One of those who have expressed such concern is Dr. Reuben Abati of *The Guardian*. In an article entitled “The prayer warriors” he complained that the manner “Holy Ghost fire” prayers were being said at a Pentecostal church he attended amounted to arguing with God. Asserting that in these churches “Prayer-time is war time”, he added: “Prayer warriors worship a God of spectacle, they reach out to a distant God who has to be shouted upon and nudged and commanded.” -*The Guardian* September 26, 2003, page 51.

In a spirited response to the article one Lola Falobi contended that the issue of “violent prayers” and “speaking in tongues” was not new, and “could be traced to as far back as when the disciples of Jesus assembled together in the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)” He continued: “Besides, Pentecostal members pray feverishly because we live in a world where Satan (and his agents) have not relented in their wickedly adventurous devices and antics...Even though the Bible states that we should ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7) I am sure you should not do that timidly, especially when Jesus told his disciples ‘the kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force’ (Matthew 11:12)” He went on to contend that if Dr. Abati had been “tormented by the devil or faced any form of spiritual attack” he will “spend all his spiritual energy to constantly rebuke Satan” and that he should not blame those who “are shouting themselves hoarse during their prayer time or who pray vigorously and fervently” as they have their reasons. – *The Guardian* November 6, 2003, page 16

There is no denying the fact that it is now common to hear at crusades and services, church leaders yelling “holy ghost!” and the congregation energetically responding, “fire” and the next line which usually follows, “Holy Ghost fire” to which they start screaming “burn them!” “Consume them!” or “destroy them!” as the case may be. According to the report by Dr. Abati the congregants were hysterically praying: “Father, destroy them. Father, bind them. I bind them in the name of Jesus. Holy Ghost fire, burn them. I say Burn them!, burn them! Holy Ghost Fire

destroy them...” (*The Guardian* September 26, 2003, page 51) Whether this type of prayer is in harmony with the Scriptures or not they do not care to know. This is of course contrary to the Bible standard which requires us to verify the truth of what we are told before we accept such as an article of faith. – 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1; Acts 17:10, 11.

Wrong notions

We must point out that the incident in Acts 2: 1-41 in which the 12 apostles spoke in tongues in fulfillment of the Lord’s promise cannot be used to justify Holy Ghost fire prayers. In the first place what happened on that day was that the apostles spoke various languages other than their own Galilean tongue. The testimony by those who heard the apostles is clear on this, as it is written “And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? **And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?** Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, **we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.**” - Acts 2:7-11.

From the text above one could see that the tongues spoken by the apostles were known languages which were understood by the people who had converged at Jerusalem for the Pentecost, a later name for the feast of weeks which comes up on the 50th day after the Passover. The apostles did not behave in a wild manner. They were preaching, not praying. What obtains these days however is that the congregation keep shouting sometimes for hours on end, uttering unintelligible sounds (which they call speaking in tongues) all in the name of prayers. This is of course the direct opposite of what happened on the day of Pentecost.

What these professed Christians fail to realize is that speaking in tongues was necessary when Christianity was at its infancy so that the gospel could reach those who were not Jews. After a while, the gift ceased. The time of speaking in tongues has passed as St. Paul himself declared. – 1 Corinthians 13:8.

When Jesus Christ spoke of the kingdom of heaven suffering “violence” and the “violent” taking it by force, he meant that the devil and his agents use violence to continually persecute the true servants of God and make false claims to the kingdom. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) History is replete with records of atrocities committed by so-called Church leaders against those they called ‘heretics’. Such churches have proved themselves not to be the servants of God. – Revelation 2:9; 3:9.

Another place cited by those who believe and teach the doctrine of Holy Ghost fire is Matthew 3:11. In the text John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus Christ stated: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” It should be noted that this text does not say one should pray for fire to destroy one’s enemies. The statement of John the Baptist meant that the mission of Christ was of a far higher order than his. After Christ had been baptized with water by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit alighted on him in the form of a dove. (Matthew 3:16-17) Thereafter he promised the apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit (or the

spirit of anointing) which fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the spirit descended on them in the form of cloven tongues of fire. (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:3-8; Acts 2:1-41) This was the baptism with the Holy Spirit spoken of by John the Baptist.

For the fact that the holy spirit helps, strengthens and teaches the servants of God to withstand the fiery trials that come their way at the instance of the devil, it is called the Comforter or the Teaching Spirit (John 14:26; John 15:26; 1 John 2:27) The holy spirit is meant to help, not to destroy people.- Romans 8:26.

The baptism of fire mentioned earlier is not about retribution but refers to the suffering which Christ and those of the heavenly class face in the course of their ministry on earth. In the Psalms, the prophet David wrote under the inspiration of God: "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Psalms 50:5) The servants of God are called into a "covenant of sacrifice" and so they are prepared to suffer anything including death in the course of their ministry. Because they of the heavenly class suffer tribulations all their days on earth Christ declared thus: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. "- Revelation 2:10.

The incident in which the prophet Elijah commanded fire to come from heaven to destroy or consume two captains and their bands (2 Kings 1) is also misconstrued by some as basis for Holy Ghost fire prayers. That was an isolated incident in the ministry of the prophet and should not be applied in this time of grace. – John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:17.

Holy Spirit not Holy Ghost

There is nothing like Holy Ghost. The word *ghost*, according to *The New Imperial Reference Dictionary* comes from the archaic English word *g'ast* which is derived from the German word *geist*, meaning "a spirit appearing after death". The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* says it means "the spirit of a dead person appearing to somebody who is still living" while the *Websters New World Dictionary* defines *ghost* as among other things "the supposed disembodied spirit of a dead person, conceived of as appearing to the living as a pale, shadowy apparition"

The word *ghost* was wrongly used by the translators of the King James Version of the Bible to stand for "spirit" which is the same thing as "breathe of life" the power of God which is responsible for the functioning of the organs. For instance John 19:30 is rendered in the King James Version as follows: "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." But the New King James Version has translated it thus: "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit". Other translations such as the *New American Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, *The Living Bible*, the *Jerusalem Bible* and so on have all changed the word *ghost* to spirit.

In the New Testament, (King James Version) there is frequent use of the term "Holy Ghost". When later translators realized this error in the use of the word "ghost", they expunged it from their translations. For instance Matthew 28:19 is rendered thus in the King James Version "Go ye

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” But this has been amended in the *New King James Version* to read "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The idea that a person continues to live after death, which is the meaning carried by the word *ghost* is of course superstitious, devilish and completely alien to the truth of the Scriptures. (Genesis 3:1-4) In Hebrews 9:27 St. Paul declared unequivocally: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”. Also, the prophet Solomon stated: “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” - Eccl 9:5, 6, 10. See also Psalm 146:3, 4.

It could be seen therefore that once a man dies, he becomes unconscious, lifeless, and inactive. He does not become a “ghost” wandering about but remains in the grave until the day of resurrection. -John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:14, 15.

Jesus' Example

That God is opposed to the practice of praying for fire to burn people is eloquently attested to by the statement of Christ when he was to pass through some Samaritan villages and they would not let him pass as it is written: “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. 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? **But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.**” - Luke 9:51-56

It could be seen that when prompted by his enraged disciples to pray for fire to destroy the Samaritans for their slight on him, Jesus Christ rebuked them. But the professed Christians of today would readily call for fire to burn their enemies. God will not answer such prayers. Jesus Christ during his sermon on the mount exhorted: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” - Matthew 5:43-48. See also Luke 6:27, 28.

It should be noted that when Christ said “pray for your enemies” and those who “despitefully use you and persecute you”, it is to the end that God will open their eyes to understand their folly so that they will turn to righteousness and not for them to be strengthened in wickedness. St. Paul also said: “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.” (Romans 12:14) He added: “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” -Romans 12:17-21; Proverbs 25:21, 22.

It should be recalled that one of the reasons God blessed Solomon richly was that he did not ask for the life of his enemies. (1 Kings 3:5-15) Even while suffering the pangs of death, Jesus Christ prayed God Almighty in this wise: “...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) St. Stephen followed the same example when as he lay dying “he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”. (Acts 7:60) The Bible warns against rejoicing when calamities befall one’s enemies as it is written: “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.” (Proverbs 24:17, 18) If it is ungodly to derive pleasure from the troubles of those who oppose righteousness, is it prayer for doom to befall such people that God will answer? Certainly not.

Therefore, praying for evil to befall one’s neighbours is clearly unchristian as it does not take account of the grace of God by which He forbears and forgives people when they repent. (Psalm 130:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:9) The Bible teaches tolerance and peaceful co-existence. (Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-42; Romans 12:18) We should be tolerant of those who do not know God or who oppose God that He may grant them repentance knowing that it is the devil who has taken them captive at his will. (2 Timothy 2:26) It needs be pointed out that some of the Samaritans were later converted to the Christian faith. (Acts 1:8; 8:14) Also, if the early apostles had called for fire to destroy Saul who later became Paul while he was persecuting them, he would not have been alive to expand the frontiers of Christianity as he did in his days by the grace and power of God.

Manner of Prayer

The Bible says that by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:16, 20) It is noteworthy that in the course of their prayers, some Christians today behave like the worshippers of Baal in their encounter with Elijah as described in 1 Kings 18. They scream or shout repeatedly at the top of their voices; they engage in outlandish gestures like vigorously waving their hands, stamping their feet, rolling on the floor, pounding the wall with their hands; running helter-skelter, uttering incomprehensible sounds in the name of speaking in tongues and so on. These are not the manifestations of the spirit of God which is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) It should also be pointed out that the spirit of the prophets is always subject to the prophets. (1 Corinthians 14:32) The spirit of God does not operate in such a way that the person will lose control of himself and behave in a wild manner.

The pattern of prayer in some churches these days is at variance with Christ's instruction in Matthew 6:5-8 to wit: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

Vengeance

There is no doubt that God will take vengeance on the wicked. But he will do so at His own time and in the manner he chooses after giving them sufficient warning. (Matthew 24:14) In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, it is stated that God Almighty commanded His servants on earth to go about setting a mark on the foreheads of all those who sigh and cry for the wickedness that are being done in the city. In other words, he should impart the truth to them. It is when that work is finished that God will command the angels to go "through the city, and smite: old and young, both maids, and little children, and women." – Ezekiel 9:4-6.

Definitely if the wicked man continues in his wickedness, he will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 11:19, 21; Psalm 19:7; Revelation 21:8) It is God Almighty Who will carry out the punishment, through Jesus Christ, not the propagators of the Holy Ghost fire doctrine. That was why in St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Thessalonica he declared that that Jesus Christ will in "flaming fire" take vengeance "on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power..." (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) The punishment will be total such that the wicked will not have chance of life again; hence it is symbolized as fire. Thus the fire is not literal but is a symbol of everlasting destruction. It should therefore be understood what St. Paul meant when he said in his letter to the Hebrews "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29)

From what has been said in this sermon, it is evident that the practice of calling for Holy Ghost fire to punish one's perceived enemies is based on ignorance. There is nothing like Holy Ghost fire in the Bible. The adherents of this dangerous doctrine should therefore retrace their steps in their own interest for their own salvation. St. Paul admonished: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words...from such withdraw thyself." – 1 Timothy 6:3-5. See also Ephesians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.