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The Torch

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That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. - 2Tim. 1:12 NIV

The Apostle Paul really faced lots of challenges as a Christian such that one doubts if occasionally he did not have to look back to the good times he had before becoming an ambassador of Christ. It was from one persecution to the other for himbut somehow he was able to remain strong in the faith till the end. In the scripture for today's devotion which is part of his second letter to Timothy, he actually described hisexperience as suffering, giving the reason for his suffering as his divine appointment as a herald and Apostle of the gospel of Jesus Christ – 2Tim. 1: 11-12. To be a herald for Jesus Christ is to be a sign to the people that Jesus is coming back just as being an Aposlte is to be a vigorous and pioneering advocate or supporter of this same gospel.

It was in a similar call that Timothy found himself as the Pastor and Teacher of the Church in Ephesus having being left there by Apostle Paul to pastor the Church there. Although Paul was currently going through the experience he described as suffering, he never stopped thinking of what is protégé must be going through, thoughts that he said left memories of Timothy's tears that he Paul can never forget – 2Tim. 1:4.

His concern for Timothy was part of the reason for doing this letter to Timothy. His letter was to let Timothy

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> **To be a herald for Jesus Christ is to be a sign to the people that Jesus is coming back just as being an Aposlte is to be a vigorous and pioneering advocate or supporter of this same gospel.**

know that even in his own suffering state, he never stopped remembering him in prayer. Being aware of the pains he is going through, he made him realise that;

1. He will need faith which he knows he already has by inheritance – 2Tim. 1:4-5.
2. He will also need to deploy his gift which he got by laying of his hands on him – 2Tim. 1:6.
3. He will need to avoid being easily frightened as he must show courage in the Ministry – 2Tim. 1:7a.
4. He will need to demonstrate power, show love and self-discipline in the operations during this call – 2Tim. 1:7b.
5. He will need to be proud of the Gospel and fellow ministers in whatever state of humiliation they may be – 2Tim. 1:8-10.

The Apostle Paul gave these advises based on his vast experience most of which were not pleasant. He was however willing to remain faithful to his call because he believed that the person that called him is faithful and he will guard his soul which he has entrusted to him. Are you sure you have a calling into the Ministry for the reasons of propagating the gospel? Then you are better prepared for an experience similar to that of Paul.

All you need to do is to work with the advice that Paul gave to Timothy.

- It will never be a smooth ride as the experience at some stages will be like suffering. Your faith needs to remain strong at all times as you will need to face very challenging events that will occur. It will definitely be tested periodically.

- You will need to plead with the Almighty God to grant you relevant gift of the Holy Spirt as it is equally necessary for the journey. This becomes necessary as your journey in the Ministry will definitely require the demonstration of power. You will need to remain very courageous and spiritually powerful whilst dispensing your ministry roles.

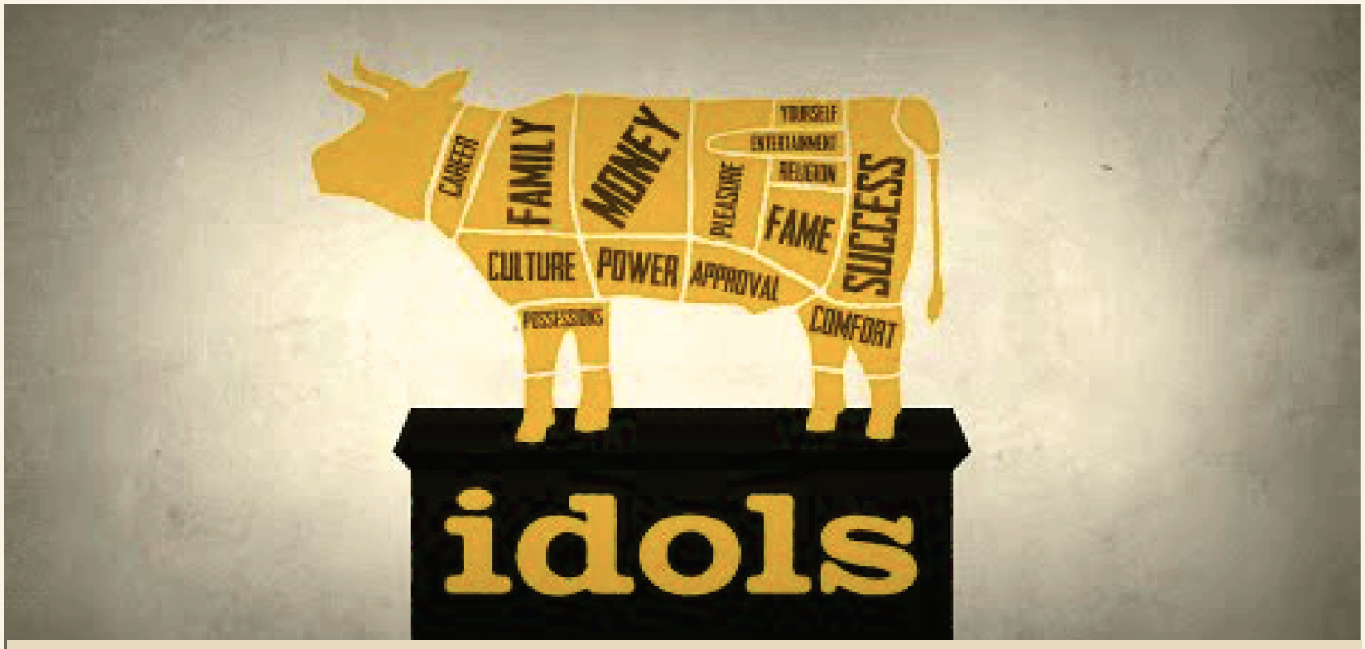
- There will be scary moments but constant awareness of the superiority of the power of the Almighty God obtained by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be required to overcome in all situations.

- You will need to relate in love. Loving the people will mean caring for them and sacrificing for them. One who does not love cannot claim to be called. It is for the love of the people that God calls people in the first place and so it will be impossible to perform the task outside love after all the Bible says that God is love.

- The need to live a disciplined life can never be negotiated if one is to succeed in the Ministry. Although the word, "disciplined" was used in the New International Version of the Bible, the King James Version of the Bible uses the phrase, "sound mind" to describe the same situation. Both will appear to mean taking decisions after careful consideration of all factors and carefully applying sound sense of judgement in their implementation.

- Above all, you should expect the worst in terms of societal treatments as no condition should be considered too low to get to, due to the Ministry challenges. In the case of Paul, he narrated his experiences in the Ministry to the Corinthians, an experience that seemed life could not have gotten worse, all because of the work of the Ministry – 2Cor. 11:23-28.

If however, you are already having those experiences that can be described as suffering, just be sure that the suffering is really because of your honest performance in the work of the Ministry, and you can rest, assured that there is a commensurate reward waiting for you, probably in this world but definitely in the life after life – 1Pet. 4:15-16. May God grant you the grace to bear the cross successfully in Jesus name. Amen



IDOLATRY AND CHRISTIANITY 1

Whereas Idolatry, a noun word, is simply the worship of idol(s), an idol is primarily defined as an image or representation of a god, used as an object of worship, with an extended definition including a person or a thing extremely admired, loved or revered. So it can be safely concluded that Idolatry is the worship of an image or representation of a god, a being or direct worship of that object. The act of worship remains the major activity around idolatry and so it becomes important to have a fair understanding of what worship entails. Worship is generally a feeling or an expression of adoration for someone or something. In conclusion, for the sin of idolatry to be committed;

1. There must be an object central to the act of idolatry which may be the real object to be worshipped or its image or any other image.
2. There must be an intense feeling or an extreme expression of adoration or reverence for the object of idolatry.

From all the above, it can be safely argued that idolatry is not only about a specific religious sect and their practices, but also any act of man, irrespective of his/her religious inclination, that tends towards the expression of adoration and reverence for a physical object. From this point of view, it also implies that anyone, if not careful can be unknowingly caught in the act. This is because it has a foundation in emotion which is an aspect of man that most people have been unable to take full control of.

Matters of emotion mostly grow quietly and unconsciously. It is usually noticed when the effect of the emotional action begins to produce undesirable effects on the person. Most human beings, for example would love to have money but when this love gets to the point where nothing else matters but the possession of the money, then such can be said to be on the verge of developing an idolatrous relationship with money. The reason for the intensity of the expressed love will not matter, as much the act of emotion expressed. Sometimes the object of idolatry can be hidden in a location with the idolater not realising it and erroneously believing that it is love for the location that is the motivating factor for intense desire to be at that location. Until something moves the object of idolatry from that location, such a person will sacrifice anything to be at that location. An individual may have the habit of being in a club almost every hour of every day with the impression given that such is very social but that may not be true as the real reason may be the assurance that he/she will achieve a particular goal which is associated with that location. None of the above acts and similar ones not mentioned, will in themselves be considered idolatry until there is an evidence of worship, that is reverence or adoration, in that emotional act. It thus becomes obvious that anyone who is unable to control any form of emotional attachment to a human being or an object is a potential idolater and such needs to be extremely cautious to avoid being caught in that act. It is good to love something (husbands, wives and children alike), but there should always be a limit to the emotional expression. This limit most times must be relative to a particular standard before it can be described as idolatry.

In the Christian environment, this standard is the love for the Almighty God. Christianity, beyond making it clear that nothing should be loved more than the Almighty God, goes further to capture the act of idolatry from its conception stage. This is evident in the instruction of the Lord to Moses on Mount Horeb. The first two of those instructions, which have since been classed as a the Ten Commandments address the issue of idolatry, which

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probably reveals the importance of avoiding this act of idolatry, to the Almighty God.

"You shall have no other gods before me. **"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,"**. - Exo. 20:3- 5 NIV

The following points extracted from that scripture give a clearer picture of God's definition of idolatry.

1. Having another being or object different from Jehovah as god will be seen as idolatry. This point acknowledges the existence of some beings or objects that may have superhuman abilities but they must never be rated above Jehovah, irrespective of the extent of their influence. This has nothing to do with whether they have superior or inferior abilities in comparison to that of the Almighty God but it is simply that there is no reason for them to be considered higher than Jehovah. It implies that the mere thought of the possibility of any being or object being better positioned to achieve any objective and be so recognised is already an act of idolatry. Nothing should ever make the Christian consider any being or object better placed to resolve an issue than Jehovah as such thoughts make such a person an idolater. You just cannot place any other god before Jehovah.

2. Creating an image with the intention of bowing or worshipping such will be idolatry. The making of the image will not be the act of idolatry since the Almighty God Himself directed Moses, when he was with him on Mount Horeb, to view all he has been shown very well as he will need to make the exact replica in the tabernacle he was to create for him on earth – Ex. 25:40.The exact replica will be an image of the things he saw. The actual act of idolatry in this instance will be bowing or worshipping such images.

To bow to such images goes beyond the physical act of bending the head or the upper part of the body or genuflecting before such objects. It is more of attaching profound reverence to those objects rather than who or what they represent. The altar of God that Moses built is a replica of what he was shown. It should be honoured and revered, not because of the physical features that are seen but the Almighty God and the heavenly setup that its presence represents. The altar without the Presence of the Almighty God remains what it is, an ordinary platform, probably elevated and within a bounded space. Same goes for the other items associated with worship sessions such as the rod of Moses and the Manna inside the Ark of Covenant, or personal items used by worshippers. They are expected to be honoured because of the God in whose name they were dedicated. Any thought different from this when these images are considered will be viewed by the Almighty God as acts of idolatry.

If the act of bowing to such images is unacceptable, then the act of worshipping them is even worse. To worship those images is to elevate them to the status of gods by associating them with super natural abilities on their own. The rod of Moses remains a rod. It was not what divided the Red Sea even though that was what Moses pointed at the Red sea. To even think that the Red Sea divided into two because of the ability of the rod is idolatry. It is the power behind the rod that should be seen. That is why pointing the rod at other times when the Lord has not said so will never split a stream, more so a Sea of the magnitude of the Red Sea. Same goes for the handkerchief and apron of the Apostle Paul (Acts 19:12), the cloak of Elijah (2Kgs. 2:8-15), etc.

Christians should be aware of the ease with which one can slip into the act of idolatry and avoid it as much as possible as it remains a major act of transgression that the Almighty God will never tolerate. Not to tolerate it will mean that He will apply all measures to prevent or punish it.

From all the above, it can be safely argued that idolatry is not only about a specific religious sect and their practices, but also any act of man, irrespective of his/her religious inclination, that tends towards the expression of adoration and reverence for a physical object.

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