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The Torch

Sunday January 17, 2021 ● A weekly Newsletter of Cross & Crown Christian Outreach

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LEASH YOUR UNBELIEF

The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" "You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!" - 2Kgs. 7:2 NIV

The king of Israel had just sworn to kill Prophet Elisha if he was to lay his hands on him. This was because it was Elisha that advised him to feast and allow the army of the king of Aram to leave when he was presented with an opportunity to wipe them out. More so, Elisha was Israel's prophet at the time and so should be able to explain why they will get to that stage and he does not have any divine solution to a problem the king was convinced had the approval of the Almighty God – 2Kgs. 6:8-33. Both reactions can still be seen as that of someone who believed in the ability of God to protect His people with the only limitation being his reliance on man that Elijah is, to serve as the intermediary. That was however not unusual then, as it was the norm to get God's opinion at those times through the Prophets.

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Prophet Elisha however disregarded the emotional outburst of the king of Israel as he set to reverse the situation by seeking the Lord on behalf of the Israelites. He indeed got a solution as he came back to make a prophetic declaration that the economic situation will make a complete and positive turn around within 24hrs – 2Kgs. 7:1. So the king was right after all, to be furious with Elisha because, anyone who knew and acknowledged this spiritual ability of Elisha will probably react worse wondering why he did not intercede earlier, but he did eventually intercede and hope of a better tomorrow was delivered. Everyone probably believed except a highly placed officer in the King's palace who made the comment that is the foundation scripture for today's devotion. He was so sure about the impossibility of such a declaration coming to pass that he actually spoke heresy. His reaction to the declaration of Prophet Elisha can be summarised as follows:

"Unbelief may be bad enough but ridiculing and maligning the reputation of the Almighty God cannot and will never go unpunished."

1. He concluded that such an economic turn around could never happen by what he probably felt was the mere pronouncement of a man like Prophet Elisha.
2. He could not see the Almighty God, even in all His greatness, being able to pull off such great feat, as even the opening of the floodgates of heaven, which in his own opinion was the best the Almighty God could do, would not be able to resolve the challenge that the famine presented, at least not that quickly.

It turned out that he was wrong as indeed the kingdom of Israel witnessed that promised economic turn around but not before Prophet Elisha had reacted to his comments. The Prophet asserted his statement about what was going to happen within 24hrs but just that the highly placed official of the king in reference will witness it but will not benefit from it. He had gotten himself into a mess for not keeping his unbelief on a leash. It may be acceptable under such circumstances, not to believe, but what will never be acceptable was for the unbelief to be expressed at all, more especially in the manner that tended to undermined and ridicule the greatness of the Almighty God.

There are so many Christians today who have been rendered psychological and emotional wrecks due to the long standing experience that seemed to have remained a permanent feature of their lives. They have been under this negative situation for so long that they have come to accept it as the norm. For some, it may not be the length of time of which the unwanted situation has been in occurrence but their personal assessment of the situation makes them feel it is bigger than any solution that they may know or can imagine. In both situations, the victims would have accepted the situation as their faith and so begin to adjust with plans on how to live with the negative situation. As much as one may not want to blame such people, it is very important to emphasise that such unbelief should be kept on a leash and not allowed to get into the zone of doubting the ability of the Almighty God, as such unleashed unbelief is what will produce the kind of comment that the official made while reacting to the pronouncement of Prophet Elisha. With the Almighty God, all things, yes! All things are possible. Do not allow your assessment and over-rating of your situation lead you into pronouncing heresies as the repercussion could be similar to that of the senior official of the king of Israel.

Unbelief may be bad enough but ridiculing and maligning the reputation of the Almighty God cannot and will never go unpunished. Many today will remain in their situation not only because of unbelief but also because of the disrespect they allow their unbelief to bring to the reputation of the Almighty God.

Consider what you stand to lose with your unbelief and make a choice to believe. Those comments made in expressing your unbelief could just be why everyone that is your colleague seem to be enjoying the blessing, whilst you are being trampled upon and are spiritually, if not physically dead. A Prophet Elisha may not need to react to your unbelief as all those comments made in the secret are open before the Lord whose reputation you are maligning, and the subsequent punishment could just be what you are witnessing or experiencing in your life. Make up your mind to believe today or at the least keep your unbelief on a leash. You may just be on your way to experiencing that long awaited miracle. May that will be your testimony very soon in Jesus name. Amen.

LOYALTY AND THE CHRISTIAN

One of the many virtues that is desired in every relationship is loyalty. Whether in marriage or in a family, in spiritual relationships or any situation in which two or more agree to relate together, loyalty remains one of the virtues that will be required to keep the relationship functional and worth the while. Even an individual is expected to be loyal to him/her self as the actions of some people will sometimes make observers doubt whether such is loyal to him/her self. This is because the human being is a trio of body, soul and spirit operating in a very intricate and inter-dependent relationship. The person needs to manage all components with loyalty to all components for peace and good health to exist.

Loyalty as a word has been defined in various ways but the common denominator in all the definitions is "the strong feeling of allegiance and faithfulness to someone, something or to a principle". Loyalty is mainly a virtue associated with all living things and everyone desires and demands to be surrounded by loyalty. However, not everyone can be loyal. This is not always because they desire not to be loyal but some circumstances may affect their resolution to be loyal some of which are listed below:

1. The individual just simply does not believe in the virtue of being loyal. For such a person, negative experiences resulting from actions of being loyal may have discouraged continuing in the act of being loyal and so is simply not interested in being loyal to anyone or may have decided to be loyal only to self.
2. Conflict of interest. An individual may desire to be loyal to another or to a principle but should there be an interest in another thing whose success will depend on the need to be disloyal to an earlier relationship, there may exist a conflict, with the individual needing to take a decision to sacrifice faithfulness to one for the other. In such a scenario, the individual will have to be disloyal to one of the relationships.
3. Lack of will power. Being loyal requires determination on the part of the one that has chosen to be loyal, to resist whatever may challenge such decision. Limited resources for example may be the reason why an individual may not be able to continue to be loyal. Depending on the break-point of the individual, he/she may not be able to sustain the loyalty and so becomes disloyal at some point.
4. Life threatening situations are most likely going to affect the loyalty that an individual displays in a relationship. The repercussion of remaining loyal may be such that may threaten the very existence of the person and such may decide to balk and become disloyal.
5. Lack of contentment and greed. This is a situation where the one that has chosen to be loyal falls for a price, in a situation that will be described as a sellout. There is simply no way a discontented or greedy person can be loyal as any loyalty on display will be there for as long as the price for the loyalty has not been met. For such a person, loyalty is to be sold to the highest bidder and no matter how much effort is put into making such comfortable and happy, there can be no assurance of loyalty being sustained.
6. Lack of self discipline and principle. The one without principle can never be loyal. A principled person once identified for a position can be relied upon to keep that position come rain or sunshine. To be principled is to be self disciplined by holding on to positions that will not be easily compromised under any condition.

The above points are no doubt, not an exhaustive list of reasons why people can be disloyal but definitely should let anyone know why the act of loyalty may not be a virtue that can be easily expected in man and if found cannot be assumed to exist at all times and in all situations. Some individuals may have been found to be loyal most times and so will be described as such but that may not be sufficient reason to believe that such a person will be loyal at all times and in all situations.

Individuals in a relationship should moderate their expectations in terms of loyalty to avoid been disappointed, as humans are more easily affected by the above factors and possibly more. Other animals are more dependable when loyalty is been considered as they are less affected by all the above factors. That probably explains the level of loyalty experienced with domestic pets like dogs and cats.

The challenge of loyalty amongst human beings does not exclude relationship between a group of Christians and the relationship between the Christian and the Almighty God. There seems to be so much confusion for the Christian when loyalty is expected. Most Christians confuse loyalty to their spiritual leader or denomination for being loyal to the Almighty God. In what seems like greater loyalty to either

their denomination or their spiritual leader, the average Christian prefers operating the instructions of the spiritual leader or prioritising the guidelines of the denomination without ensuring the conformity of such guidelines or instructions with biblical injunctions which are from the Lord.

A quick recap of the definition of loyalty is "the strong feeling of allegiance and faithfulness to someone, something or to a principle". That being the case, allegiance and faithfulness to a spiritual leader or to the doctrine of a denomination at the expense of the rules and instructions of the Almighty God as laid out in the scriptures will no doubt indicate loyalty to them rather than to the Almighty God.

It is hardly surprising though that Christians seem to remain loyal to their spiritual leaders or their denomination than the Almighty God. This is because there is hardly any emphasis on teaching the Word of God and even where the word is preached, it is seen as the Word of the spiritual leader with the followers constantly starting every conversation with the phrase, "my Pastor or my Bishop or my Prophet or my Shepherd said…" rather than the phrase, "the Almighty God in the scriptures said…". This is the result of these spiritual leaders constantly making themselves the focus during their ministrations rather than the Almighty God. The Bible says faith, which is the root word for faithfulness comes by hearing, and so it should not be a surprise that the Christian that constantly hears only his spiritual leader preach messages that project self always will decide to have faith more in such a leader than in the Almighty God. The "Almighty God" or the name "Jehovah" is not used as often as the phrase, "the god of…" with the name of their spiritual leader slotted in blank space. The Christian in such denomination thus hears more about the spiritual leader or the denomination rather than Jehovah or the Almighty God.

The Almighty God desires that the Christian is, and remains loyal to Him at all times. By this, it means he expects the Christian to remain faithful to him at all times and owe their allegiance to Him. This however does not seem to be the case as Christians will rather remain faithful to their spiritual leaders than being faithful to the Almighty God. They most times owe their allegiance to their spiritual leaders whom they have come to see as god rather than God's representative. The leader is also happy with such attention and so does little or nothing to change the thinking of the follower. The implication is the Christian unknowingly gravitating towards idolatry with either the spiritual leader or their denomination as the idol. The Christian thus goes to church believing that he/she is there to worship the Almighty God but in reality is there to worship the spiritual leader as it is the word of the leader that is sacrosanct.

The Almighty God no doubt desires loyalty and rewards it generously. It is simply impossible to claim to be a Christian without being loyal to the Almighty God. To be loyal to Him will mean that His position on all issues is sought at all times and nothing detracts from such views at the point of implementation. There is the strong demonstration of faithfulness and allegiance to the Lord in all situations and at all times. It is simply impossible for the Christian, no matter how sincere he/she may be about the desire to be loyal to the Almighty God, to do so when such is not conversant with his position on specific issues either through reading and meditating in His Words or being directly led by the Holy Spirit. Beyond being required to know the Will of the Almighty God and to the need to strictly adhere to them, the Christian that intends to be loyal to the Almighty God also needs the Holy Spirit as it provides the enablement to be able to overcome all the points earlier listed as possible obstacles to being loyal. Some of those points will definitely require supernatural abilities to overcome, which the ordinary man does not possess. Even Jesus Christ was going to become disloyal to his mission and father when he pleaded that the cup be made to pass over him (Matt. 26:39-45), but then had to plead with the father to glorify him with the father responding that he had done that – Jn. 17:5. This was his quiet way of seeking enablement for the task ahead.

The Almighty God never stops testing loyalty in Christians with the successful ones adequately rewarded. Ranging from Abraham (Gen. 22:1-19), to the three Hebrews (Dan. 3:1-18) and even Daniel (Dan. 6:1-16) and Job (Job 1:6-12), the Almighty God confirms loyalty amongst all those who claim to love him and definitely gets disappointed if he is let down. He could never really get over the disappointment that Moses was as he kept on referencing how he did not honour him at the water of Meribah, at every opportunity – Num. 20:2-13. In fact, it was the main reason why he did not allow him to enter the Promise land – Deut. 32:51-52.

Christians must always remain loyal to the Almighty God and his son Jesus Christ and should expect that their claims to loyalty will be tested at some point. It is only the person that passes His loyalty test that he considers to be His. In order to maintain the virtue of loyalty to Him at all times, the Christian should;

1. Make the Bible a friend. It should not only be read but the content must be meditated on day and night.
2. Make the Holy Spirit a friend. It is simply impossible to remain loyal to the Almighty God without the enablement provided by the Holy Spirit.
3. Make the desire to please the Almighty God at all times the priority. Like Abraham, nothing should be too big to give to the Lord once there is confirmation through the Holy Spirit that it is the Lord that is talking and not the deception of men.

As simple as these guidelines are, they are sufficiently potent if practiced to ensure that the Christian is well prepared to maintain loyalty to the Lord at all times and in all situations. Being loyal to the Almighty God is an act that will never be regretted as he rewards it not only in this world but even in the life after life. Do all to remain loyal to Him and He will not disappoint you. May you be sufficiently empowered to remain loyal to him at all times and in all situations in Jesus name. Amen.

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