

## **Paul's discourse on Romans 1:1-6 as a basis for authentic evangelism for Christians in the Southeast of Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

*This article examines Paul's discourse on Romans 1:1-6 as a basis for authentic evangelism for Christians in south-eastern Nigeria. The approach was qualitative as it enabled the writer to have an in-depth exploration of words, ideas, meaning and experience. The historical-critical method and contextual tools were used in the interpretation of biblical text. The study revealed that the gospel as presented by Paul has Jesus Christ as its substance and content; its origin traceable to the heart of the Father; its attestation by the prophets in the Old Testament and apostles in the New Testament; its scope as universal; its purpose as obedience of faith and, its goal as the honour of Christ's name. It is expected that if the gospel is faithfully preached in the south-eastern Nigerian as presented by Paul, although it will not be without ridicule, contempt and opposition, yet it will undermine denominational superiority and arrogance,*

*challenge monopoly of truth, self-indulgence and apathy, pull down divisible walls and proffer holistic healings to entire body of Christ. More so, there will likely be even distribution and allocation of state resources as well as equity and fair play in the management of material and human resources.*

### **Introduction**

There are probably as many divisive walls among Christians as there are many Churches in the south-eastern Nigeria today. The rivalry which was planted and nurtured by the missionaries- Roman Catholics and Protestants, particularly Anglicans- has grown and exacerbated into something else, with Roman Catholics taking the lead. Priest (2020) captures the feud very well when she writes:

The Igbo observed the two agencies (RCM and CMS) battle for survival as they belittled and defamed each other through derogatory songs, dramas or sermons, such as this example: *‘Fadasiriofeonugbutinyeyaazugbamgbam, Silemensiasarausaetinyeyaosenaanya*(‘Fa da (RCM) cooked bitter leaf soup with tinned fish. Silemensi (CMS) with long throats came and were punished by the RCM who rubbed pepper in the

Silemensis' eyes). The 'bitter' relations and the conviction of the one that the other was an agent of the devils negated the message of both sets of missionaries before the Igbo (p. 30).

Since then, Church pulpits are used as vindictive vendetta against one denomination or another. Court cases about boundary lines between one denomination or another abound. People are discriminated against on the bases of their denominational affiliations in times of employment, allocation of state resources, distribution of ministerial offices, government appointments, admissions into tertiary institutions especially if it is a mission-owned institution and promotions in state government employments. This long-running religious feud among various denominations subtly spill into families, clans, villages and towns; weakening family ties and strengths; destroying brotherly affections and tolerance as well as peaceful coexistence.

In view of this apparent state of affairs about the Churches in the Igboland, that is, southeast, one can possibly laugh the evangelistic efforts of the Church off the court given that the evangelistic enthusiasm is derived from the untamed ambition for the honour of the denomination rather than Christ. In a bid to gain dominance over other denominations, some denominations tend to claim monopoly over the truth,

and ultimately over the gospel and dare to say that there is no salvation outside the confines of their own religious block. Unknown to them, pride of dominance appears to blindfold them and darken their mind to realize that the gospel is for everybody, irrespective of denomination without exception and without distinction. Little wonder then that the number of people who accept Jesus as Saviour without surrendering to him as Lord are on appreciable increase.

In this kind of prevailing atmosphere, it is not uncommon for Christian witness to suffer untold setbacks as the spirit of strife prevails. Denominational fanatics key into it and display some kind of irrational zeal which, if possible, would force and compress other members of Church denominations into their own denominational mould. Resentments, accusations and counter-accusations abound as one pastor accuses the other of sheep/flock stealing. There tends to exist enmity, bitterness, strife, rancour and bickering among Church leaders who suppose to show examples. Consequent upon this, rival evangelism tends to be the order of the day.

It is likely that when one comes to the southeast and basks in the religious atmosphere, one is likely to have the impression that the whole of the south-eastern Nigeria has been evangelised. While Ozigbo (1995) described south-east as the “heartland of Christianity in Nigeria” (p. 5); Uchendu (2012) saw it as “Africa’s

homogeneous Christian region” (p. 1). Equally, Uchendu (2020) would later come to designate the area as “Nigeria Christian homeland” (p.1). However, on a closer examination, one can no longer pretend ignorance of the fact that a good percentage number of people in south-eastern Nigeria remain unevangelised as a good number of people are merely Christians in theory but not in practice. Again, while some people are nominal Christians, some others are either returning to idol worship or sweeping over to other faith, like Muslim. Consequently, they are subjects of evangelism owing to the fact that the gospel is for everybody as evangelical efforts are made to be liberated from prideful inclination to denomination and acknowledge the totality of gospel for all without racial or denominational discrimination.

In the same vein, Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles was at pains in the epistle to the Romans to clarify the place of law in salvation and to secure the unity of Jews and the Gentiles in the body of Christ through obedience to the gospel. In his own contribution, Stott (1994) writes that “redefinition and reconstitution of the people of God, as comprising Jewish and Gentile believers on equal terms, is a critical theme which pervades the letter” (p. 31). It is therefore against this backdrop that this study is carried out to examine Paul’s discourse on Romans 1: 1-6 and present it as a basis for authentic evangelism for Christians in south-eastern Nigeria.

## **Exegesis and discussion**

When Pauline epistle to Romans is read, it is discovered that Paul was exceptionally detailed in introducing himself to the Romans unlike what is witnessed in his other epistles. The man, Paul eagerly explains his relationship to the gospel in chapters one to six; his relationship to Romans in chapters seven to thirteen; and his relationship to evangelism in chapters fourteen to sixteen. However, the main focus of this paper is on chapter 1:1-6.

As mentioned above, Paul deviated from the convention of his day by giving a detailed account of himself in his introduction. This presupposes that the Church in Rome was not established by him. Perhaps, he has not visited the brothers and sisters there and naturally feels the need to familiarize himself with them by giving them the resume of the gospel he proclaims as well as to establish his qualifications as a member of the apostolic band.

Paul opens his epistle to Romans in verse one with: *PaulosdouloschristouIesou, kletosapostolosaphorismenoseiseuaggeliontheo* (Paul, a servant of Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God). First, Paul described himself as *douloschristouIesou* (a servant of Christ Jesus). The word *doulos* can be translated as “slave”, “servant”, “bondman” or “bondservant”. In the Old Testament there was a progression of individuals like Moses (Jos. 1:2),

Joshua (Jos. 24:29) who called themselves Yahweh's servants. The distinctive feature of the prophets of Israel is that they were God's servants (Amos 3:7; Jer. 7:25). When Paul calls himself *doulos christou Iesou* (slave of Jesus Christ), he was ranking himself with the prophets of the old. The word *doulos* was also used as a collective term to designate the people of Israel. Israel is therefore explicitly described as "God's servants" in Isaiah 49:3. Stott (1994) remarked that at present, the "Lord's servants" are no longer Israel, but all the people of God without class or distinction. In other words, when one is in Christ and pledges one's allegiance to Christ as one's Lord and personal Saviour, one is the Lord's servant.

Second, Paul described himself as *kletos apostolos* (called to be an apostle). The noun *apostolosis* derived from the verb *apostello* meaning "to send" or "a person sent". This title is applied to Jesus for in Hebrew 3:1, he is called our *apostolon kai archiereia* (our apostle and high priest). It is also not only applied to those sent by God to preach to Israel (Lk.11:49) but also to those sent by Churches (2 Cor.8: 23; Phil.2:25). Much more, the title is entirely applied to those who were held in high esteem and command supreme authority in the early Church.

There is no gainsaying that the credentials for an apostle are divine call and commissioning by Christ. As for the Twelve, this is done during Christ's earthly ministry. Acts 1:21-22 furnishes us with the essential qualifications of an apostle: one who has been a disciple

of Jesus from the time of John's baptism to the ascension; one who has been acquainted with the whole course of the ministry and work of Jesus Christ; and one who must be a witness of the resurrection. If the above are the necessary conditions for the office of apostolate, what about Matthias, and, of course, Paul? "The sense of divine commissioning is not less evident: God has already chosen the apostle (Acts 1:24), even though his choice is not yet known. No laying of hands is mentioned". As for Paul, he claims that he was directly commissioned by Christ (Rom.1:1; Gal.1:1; Cor. 1:1) and that he has "seen the Lord (1 Cor.9:1) and that by that very fact, a witness of the resurrection. Just like Matthias, Paul was accepted, not appointed into the apostolic band as he never derived his authority from other apostles. Although Paul remained conscious of his background as an enemy and persecutor rather than a disciple, yet he never ceases to rank himself with the other apostles and associated his gospel with theirs. It is rather safe to say that the New Testament apostles are along the same continuum of the Old Testament prophets as the people who were "called", "commissioned" and "sent" by God to speak in his name. As a slave Paul disrobes himself of any human merits and claims, whereas as an apostle, Paul sees himself as having an undeserved honour and rights conferred on him by the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, while his role as a slave humbles him before the Lord, his role as an apostle



confers a great honour and authority on him by the Lord. This is where the beauty of these roles lie and as well as where their knot is tied.

Third, Paul described himself as *aphorismenoseiseuaggeliontheo* (set apart for the gospel). Twice in his life *aphorismenos* is used of Paul. He writes in Galatians 1:15, *Hote de eudokesenhotheoshoaphorisas me ekkoilias metros mou...* (But when God who set me apart from birth...) indicating that long before he was born, he had been set apart for the task of the good news. With this disposition of heart, Paul ranks himself with prophets Isaiah (Isa. 49:1) and Jeremiah (Jere.1:5) whose calling, separation and appointment took place before they were born. So, in this case, it is God who first sets him apart for the task. In Acts 13:2 he was also set apart by the Church. The Holy Spirit asked the Church at Antioch to *aphorise* (separate) Paul and Barnabas for the special mission to the Gentile world. It is interesting to note that the verb *aphorismenos* shares the same root meaning as *pharisaios* (Pharisee). Reflecting on this, Nygren (1949) asserts, “As a Pharisee Paul had set himself apart for the law, but now God had set him apart for...the gospel” (p.45). In corroboration, Stott (1994) thinks, “We need, therefore, to think of Paul’s Damascus road encounter with Christ not only as his conversion but as his commissioning to be an apostle (*ego apostello se*, ‘I send you’, I make you an apostle’), and especially to be an

apostle to the Gentiles” (p.47). In this setting apart, Paul was mindful of the task he had received and of which he was committed to do both for God and the body of Christ. Cranfield (1975) beautifully sums it up this way, “to serve the gospel by and authoritative and normative proclamation of it” (p.53).

In verse 2 Paul writes: *hopropeggeilatodia ton prophetonautou en graphaishagiais* (the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures). The phrase *hopropeggeilato* (the gospel he promised beforehand), is of special interest here. It floods our hearts with the true nature and origin of the gospel. It is *euaggeliontheo* (the gospel of God). The gospel traces its origin to the very heart of God and not to sophistry, vain speculations and clever inventions of human minds. God’s counsel of salvation, his good news to humankind and his redemptive package was foreordained in detail even before the world began and before they came into effect. Again, the phrase *dia ton propheton en graphiashagiasis* (through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures) is indicative of the means of conveyance and reception. The gospel was neither the brainchild of the prophets nor that of the apostles, it was revealed to them by God. The phrase *en graphaishagiasis* (in the Holy Scriptures) presupposes God’s gracious acts in time and history to put this eternal promise in black and white and in human words. Realistically, Christianity is neither a figment of one’s

imagination nor a product of blind chance but the resultant effect of preordained counsel and eternal purpose of God. In an unmistakable term, Paul writes to the Church of God in Corinth: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). In Thessalonica Paul went into the Jewish synagogue and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures explaining and proving that Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah’, he said to them” (Acts 17:2-3). Jesus himself was quite clear that the Scriptures testify about him (Jn. 5:39). It therefore stands to reason that when one reads through the Old Testament to the New Testament, one is likely to behold the obvious continuity between the Testaments. It is amazing how the Prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament jointly bear witness to Christ.

In verse three, Paul writes: *Peritouhuiouautoutougenomenouekspermatos David kata sarka* (regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David). Sott (1994) thinks that “If we bring verses 1 and 3 together, by omitting the parenthesis of verse 2, we are left with the statement that Paul was set apart for the gospel of God regarding his Son” (p. 49). Luther (1954) writes: “The Content, or

Object of the Gospel or as some put it, the Subject, is Jesus Christ” (p. 35). Calvin (1540) thinks, “The whole gospel is contained in Christ; to move a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel” (p. 15). In other words, the gospel centres in the Son of God and suffice it to say that the gospel is the good news of the Father about his Son to humankind.

When we take verses three and four together we have: *Peritouhuiouautoutougenomenouekspermatos David kata sarka, touhoristhentoshuioutheou en dunamei kata pneumahagiosunes ex anastaseosnekron, IesouChristoutoukuriouhemon*(regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord). When one critically studies the above verses, one discovers the inherent parallelism in it that prompted many scholars to infer that Paul made use of an early creed. If it were so, Paul intelligently organizes it and gives it his apostolic approval. It expresses a contrast between two titles: *spermatos David* (seed of David) and *huioutheou*(Son of God); between two verbs: *ginomai* (to become) and *horizo* (declare); and between two qualifying clauses: *kata sarka* (according to the flesh) and *kata pneumahagiosynes* (according to Spirit of holiness).

Generally, both the “Son of David” and “Son of God” were recognized as messianic titles. The two titles

bear witness to Jesus' humanity and deity. The question, however, remains whether Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection? To this end, Stott (1994) notes that "The New Testament does not teach that Jesus was appointed, established or installed Son of God at or by the resurrection, since he has been the Son of God eternally" (p. 50). Stott goes on to argue that the problem is with the word "horizo" which does not really mean "declare". For him it is better translated "appoint" as when God "appointed" Jesus the Judge of the world. Nygren (1944) captures the contrast well when he posits: "So the resurrection is the turning point in existence of the Son of God. Before that he was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness; through the resurrection he becomes the Son of God in power" (p. 51).

More so, almost all the scholars agree that *kata sarka* (according to flesh) refers to Jesus' incarnation with its inherent weaknesses over against the power intrinsic in his resurrection. However, when it comes to *kata pneumahagiosynes* (according to the Spirit of holiness) opinions differ. The argument is whether "according to Spirit of holiness" must be translated as "according to his divine nature". In preserving the parallelism "according to flesh" and "according to Spirit," one has to understand that it was neither Jesus' humanity nor his deity that was raised from the dead or appointed "Son-of-God-in power" by the resurrection

but Jesus in his entirety, “body and Spirit, human and divine”. Stott (1994) thinks that “it seems then that two expressions “according to flesh” and according to the Spirit” refer not to two natures of Jesus Christ (human and divine), but to two stages of his ministry, pre-resurrection and post-resurrection, the first frail and the second powerful through the outpoured Spirit” (pp. 50-51). In verses three and four, Paul furnishes us with Jesus’ uniqueness that can never be found anywhere else in time and in eternity: his humiliation and his exaltation; his weaknesses and his divine power; his human descent and his divine Sonship. Luther (1954) however writes, “The gospel, then, is joyous message of Christ, the Son of God, who first humbled himself and then was glorified through the Holy Spirit. Gospel therefore is not merely what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have written, but, as the verses show, the Word concerning the Son of God, who was made man, suffered, and was glorified” (p. 37).

Again, taking verses five and six together we have: *di ouelabomencharinkaiapostololeneishupakoenpisteos en pasintoisethnesinhupertouonomatosautou, en oisestekaihumeiskletoiIesouChristou* (Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ). In setting himself apart for Jesus Christ, Paul writes he had received “*charis* (grace) and

“*apostole*” (apostle). *Charis* always describes some gift which is totally free and totally undeserved. Before his conversion, he had sought to earn his praise and merit both in the sight of God and people through a rigorous and strict observance of the works of the law but to no avail. Now, he has come to the realization that what he could do was not important but what God had done. It has often been said that “law lays down what we must do, but the gospel lays down what God had done”. In other words, salvation predicates not upon what human efforts could do through the power of muscle but upon what God had done through his Son. All is of grace- free and unearned. Paul also received *apostole* (apostleship). As an apostle, he knew without being told he was set apart for a special responsibility.

Paul identifies the scope of the gospel to include *pasintoisethnesin* (all the Gentiles, nations). He further describes the gospel in Romans 1:16 as *dunamis gar theou estine issoterian panti to pisteuonti, Ioudaiote proton kai Elleni* (power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentiles). What Paul was establishing is that the gospel is not only universal in its scope, but also, it is for everyone. Stott (1994) provides a beautiful summary of this:

The gospel is for everybody; its scope is universal. He himself was a patriotic Jew,

who retained his love for his people and longed passionately for their salvation (9: 1ff; 10:1). At the same time, he had been called and committed to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We too, if we are to be committed to world mission, will have to be liberated from all the pride of race, nation, tribe, caste and class, and acknowledge that God's gospel is for everybody, without exception and without distinction. (pp.51-52).

Paul also writes that he receives his apostleship *eishupakoenpisteos* (into obedience of faith). Probably, by this expression: *hupakoenpisteous*, Paul intends to bring out the necessary response which the gospel demands- a complete and unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. As an apostle of faith, Paul knows that the faith he was promoting is the true and living faith in Jesus Christ that issues in an unreserved submission to his Lordship. The implication of this is that one who accepts Jesus as one's Saviour without surrendering to him as one's Lord is seemingly having an outfit of delirium.

Above all, let us mark another important phrase used by apostle Paul: *onomatosautou* (for his name's sake). Paul proffers us with the reason why all nations should be brought to "the obedience of faith". It is



nothing other than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be honoured and glorified. To put it in another way, the goal of missions is for the sake of glory and splendour of Christ's name. It is not in vain that the Holy Spirit through Luke declared expressively to the world in Acts 4:12: *Kai oukestin en allooudeni he soteria, oude gar onomaestinheteronhupo ton ouranon to dedomenon en an thropois en o deisothernaihemas* (Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved). Jesus Christ is the Father's choice- there is no other; 'there is no other name'. Stott (1994) captures it well when he writes:

If, therefore, God desires every knee to bow to Jesus and every tongue to confess him, so should we. We should be 'jealous' (as Scripture sometimes puts it) for the honour of his name- troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honour and glory which are due to it. The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that

incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but zeal- for the glory of Jesus Christ. (p.53).

### **The Summary of Paul's discourse**

- (a) "The gospel of God" (v. 1) is "the gospel of his Son" (v. 9). Its origin is not traceable to human will. It emanated from the heart of the Father, revealed and committed to his servants- prophets and apostles- through revelation. In other words, the message for the lost world is God's own good news and not the clever inventions of humanity, their philosophy and their religion. By implication, those who have given their lives to Jesus Christ are God's servants and should have unreserved and unwavering submission and commitment to Jesus Christ.
- (b) The content of the gospel is Jesus Christ. God's good news is about Jesus not about religion, denomination or any new idea or philosophy. Everything from the beginning to the end is to be understood in relation to Christ; anything more or less than that is a deviation from the gospel. This presupposes that anything that falls short of this is termed "another gospel" and as a result unacceptable. Jesus Christ and He alone crucified

is all-sufficient for our salvation. The content of our gospel, therefore, admits zero tolerance for other additions, substitutes and alternatives.

- (c) The gospel has dual attestation. The prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament bear testimony to Jesus Christ. The apostles in the New Testament and the prophets of the Old Testament are in the same continuum as people who are being ‘called’ and ‘sent’ to speak in his name. Together, they bear witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself was quite clear that the Scriptures testify about him. By extension, believers who are blood-washed and are children of the Most High God are among the able ministers of the new covenant and should bear witness to Christ, by word, deed and actions, particularly their lifestyle.
- (d) The gospel is for everyone. It is for the Jews as well as the Gentiles. It is for every nation without racial or class distinction. He is for the Old and for the young; for everybody without exemption, and without distinction. It is indeed, a universal gospel.
- (e) The gospel is to be proclaimed. The proclamation is geared towards bringing people to a “total unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ”. Hunakind are saved in order to bring others to the

obedience of faith; to pledge allegiance “to Jesus Christ and surrender completely to him as Lord. In the life of a professing Christian, Christ’s salvific work and Lordship must be seen and held in appropriate balance otherwise one is not worth being classified as a Christian. The proclamation of the gospel is a must and not optional for the Christians; it is both normative and imperative.

- (f) The gospel motive and goal is the honour of Christ’s name. All zeal, every passion and every burning drive must be directed for the glory of Jesus Christ and Him alone. Before this supreme goal of bringing glory and honour to His name, all unworthy goals come withering and crumbling down.

### **Principles of authentic evangelism in south-eastern Nigeria**

Resulting from Pauline discourse above is his assertion of his divine call, divine origin of his apostolic commission and divine origin of his gospel. His mission together with his message was not the product of creative ingenuity of human brain but a direct activity of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ. Every Christian, irrespective of his denomination should as well realize the divine origin of his call as a servant of God. As far as he/she has had a genuine encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, it is safe to

say that he/she is a servant of the Lord. When the Christian goes out to proclaim the gospel, like Paul, he would realize that the gospel is “God’s own good news for a lost world”; the Christian good news. Like Paul he would realize that the message to share is not his but God’s message; that the gospel to proclaim is not his but God’s and that the words of the gospel are not his but God’s. This gives the Christian no room to claim ownership of the gospel or to see the gospel as the property of his/her denomination.

When the Christian goes out to proclaim the gospel to the lost, he is not going out to proclaim some good news about his own denomination. He is not going out to share with people of how good his denomination or his pastor is. What he is to share is not the resultant effect of human psychological analysis or fanciful philosophical speculations. The gospel he is to share is not by all means a figment of his imagination. It is not about how to live right or how to acquire some good moral principles. It is not a new religion to add to already existing ones. It is rather the good news of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ who was crucified for the sinful world. For God took the initiative to redeem man from the chains and shackles of sin. On the cross and through Christ, humanity saw His *endeixis* (demonstration) of His love, justice, wisdom, holiness and mercy; His *apolytroxis* (redemption) and his *hilasterion* (atonement or propitiation). This is what God

has done for us once for all through Jesus Christ his only Son our God. For we are slaves and captives of sin and guilt, but God through his only Son had redeemed us paying as a ransom the precious blood of Jesus Christ.; consequently, we are his through the vicarious deeds of Christ on the cross. On the cross, He had redeemed us, propitiated His wrath and demonstrated His justice that humanity might live to His honour and praise. Hence, this is the story humankind are to proclaim; the news all Christians are to share and what all believers are to appropriate in their lives by faith.

Every denomination in the south-east should realize that the origin of the gospel is God and not her own invention. At best, it is safe to say that it is entrusted to Christians. As trustees of the gospel, they are to live out its truth, declare and proclaim its truth, defend its truth and uphold its truth. They are not to truncate it, wrest it, contort and distort it, mutilate it, and twist it at will in order to meet their selfish ends. As trustees of the gospel, they are called to handle it faithfully for they will give account of it at the end. Given that the gospel originated in the heart of God and God is love; every an authentic evangelism, by this very fact, is therefore, disrobed of self-importance, self-projection, self-assertion, self-confidence or self-righteousness. So, in dealing with the gospel, every tinge of selfishness and every personal or denominational interest must dissolve. More so, given that the gospel originated in God, it is expected that the

gospel should serve as a bond of love and not an instrument of division; a means of building up and not tearing down, a means of bringing peace and not crisis in families and societies. It therefore stands to reason that anything that revels in the above negativities is not a gospel at all as presented by the man, Paul.

As a consequence of Paul's discourse, Christians in the south-east should realize that for an authentic proclamation of the gospel, they should be faithful to the substance or the content of the gospel; for instance, when evangelist Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts of Apostles chapter 8, the Bible records that "he began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (verse 35). In proclamation of the gospel, Jesus should be the story, the focus and the end point of the discussion. Any addition or subtraction from the substance or content of the gospel which is Jesus is no longer a gospel. In other words, the gospel proclamation which launches an attack against other people, denomination or race is no longer a gospel. The gospel, from all its intents and purposes, does neither discriminate, condemn nor stigmatize, it rather teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

For Paul, the gospel motive and goal is the honour of Christ's name. It is unfortunate that the zeal which sometimes accompanies the evangelical campaign of some Christians is the honour of their denomination.

Sometimes, some group of ministers come together to organise crusades with the ulterior motive of making money. Such group of ministers who are money-driven are gifted with oratorical skills and power of conviction and can manipulate their prey at will. They are specialist at reading into the Scriptures the things and ideas which are contradictory in terms to the content and context of the passage of the Scripture they are handling. Catching into the poor economic situation of the country, they peddle the message which will arouse the interest of the poverty-stricken people in their clever attempt to manipulate and extort them financially to meet their selfish ends. Little wonder then that there appears to be more ministers of God who are untutored, self-acclaimed, parochial, sentimental, narrow-minded ministers in narrow-minded ministries than the genuine men and women of God who are driven with undefiled zeal for the honour and goal of Christ's name in their evangelical campaigns.

Finally, as a consequence of Paul's discourse, the gospel is to be proclaimed. An authentic proclamation of the gospel must be accompanied with a sense of conviction, commitment and gospel-transformed lifestyle. The proclamation is primarily to bring people under the Saviourhood and Lordship of Christ. The gospel of good news of salvation is equally the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel does not only bring forgiveness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; it also



challenges and transforms the social order. So, as Christians faithfully proclaim the gospel, it impacts not only body, soul and spirit, but also individuals and society as well. Sider (1992) posits, “Full communication of good news of Jesus’ kingdom is possible only by word and deed, only by proclamation, miracles, acts of mercy and justice, and incarnational modelling” (p. A-89). In other words, in the proclamation of the gospel, every effort must be made to be holistic in approach. Douglas (1975) captures the holistic nature of gospel proclamation when he writes:

The *evangel* is God’s good news in Jesus Christ; it is good news of the reign he proclaimed and embodies; of God’s mission of love to restore the world to wholeness through the cross of Christ and him alone; of his victory over the demonic powers of destruction and death; of his Lordship over the entire universe; it is good news of a new creation; of a new humanity, a new birth through him by his life-giving Spirit; of the gifts of the messianic reign contained in Jesus and mediated through him by his Spirit; of the charismatic community empowered to embody his reign of shalom here and now before the whole creation and make his

good news seen and known. It is good news of liberation, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global and cosmic. (p. 1294).

One cannot possibly plead ignorance of the social ills, long-running religious feud among various denominations and denominational politics inherent in the south-eastern Nigeria. However, as a consequence of Paul's discourse above, the genuine proclamation of the gospel is likely to result in righting the wrongs, not only in personal and corporate lives, but also in the social order. It is likely to proffer holistic healings-psychological, spiritual, emotional, physical and social-thereby restoring our holistic well-being.

### **Conclusion**

Rival evangelism must no longer be allowed to undermine and disrupt the unity of professing Christians. Paul was clear enough to show that the gospel of grace and faith can unite every Christian denomination in the south-eastern Nigeria by opening the door to all and sundry and levelling the most important and highly placed individuals in the society as well as the rank and file members of human society at the foot of Christ's cross. At the same foot of Christ's cross and through faith in the vicarious deeds of Christ on the cross, Christians are on the same par with one another

irrespective of denomination, class, race, nationality, sex, language, colour and age. These variables and parameters do neither affect our fellowship with one another, obstruct our relationship with God nor obliterate our position in Christ as Jesus' as heirs of salvation and joint heirs with Him. The gospel as presented by Paul has Jesus Christ as its substance and content, its origin in the heart of the Father, its attestation by the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament, its scope as universal, its purpose as obedience of faith and, its goal as the honour of Christ's name. If the gospel is faithfully preached in the south-eastern Nigeria as presented by Paul, although it will not be without ridicule, contempt and opposition, yet it is expected to undermine denominational superiority and arrogance, challenge monopoly of truth, self-indulgence and apathy, pull down divisible walls and proffer holistic healings to the entire body of Christ. Given that south-eastern Nigeria is predominantly a Christian region, there will be even distribution and allocation of natural resources as well as equity and fair play in the management of material and human resources.

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