

KNOWING WHEN TO GIVE UP

Today's Text: Hosea Chap. 14

Extracts:

O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you, and return to the Lord. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods,' for in You the fatherless finds mercy." "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him."... Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them, for the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them; but transgressors stumble in them [Hos. 14: 1-4, 9]

The bulk of Nigeria's wealth comes from the oil and gas fields of the Niger Delta region which has suffered political neglect and environmental degradation over the years. Demanding more control over the region's destiny, militants have taken up arms against the Federal Government. They attack pipelines and other oil facilities and kidnap foreign oil workers to dramatize their cause.¹ With a combination of military pressure and negotiations, the Government has tried to resolve the matter but with no clear success so far. Recently, however and quite unexpectedly, the Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM), one of the militant groups, announced that it was laying down arms. In reaction to that announcement, another group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta MEND, said that it would continue to fight.

*Why is one group ready to give up fighting **now** while the other wants to continue? NDVM said its members were "tired of staying in the swamps," while MEND said it would only surrender arms "under a just system," Right now, you may find yourself in a mortal struggle with a strong enemy or opponent that you cannot defeat. More specifically, you may still be waging a big fight over whether or if to give up sinning and surrender your life to God. You know that you cannot win, yet you keep on fighting. When are you going to give up? Let us find out in today's lesson.*

¹ Based on the following sources: Timeline: Nigeria- A chronology of key events, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1067695.stm ; George Onah, "Ateke bows, says 'I'm tired of fighting,'" www.vanguardngr.com, 21 January 2008, and Kelvin Ebiri, "MEND gives condition for the surrender of its weapons," www.ngguardiannews.com 27 January 2007

1. Introduction: Playing the hero!

In today's Bible Text [Hosea 14], the prophet admonished the people of Israel to give up their sinful ways and return to the Lord; otherwise, they would continue to stumble on account of their sins [Hos. 14: 1]. In order to appreciate the import of that message, let us begin with the world that we know.

All through history, the people that we call heroes and admire are those who refused to give up in the face of overwhelming odds. For example, as Hitler's war planes pounded British cities, especially London, during the Second World War, and commonsense suggested imminent defeat, the then British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, rallied the troops and the people with his defiant speeches. He urged them to fight on, saying on one occasion, "our heads may be bloody but they are not bowed!" Britain and the Allied forces went on to win that war. In sports, illness, political struggles, etc., people that have refused to give up until victory have been toasted and held up as our heroes and idols. Mohammed Ali, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi readily come to mind. Even in our churches, men and women of God are never tired of admonishing their members in need of one favour or the other from God to "hang in there!"

Unfortunately, we love to extend the tendency to holding on to sin. Instead of acknowledging and confessing our sins, we plead with our "critics" to understand that we are mere humans. We even form or join "civil" rights movements to defend our cause, such as the right to abortion or same-sex marriage or to remove the mention of God from the public domain. Why are we reluctant or unwilling to give up our wicked ways?

2. Why we don't give up

The following reasons should be noted, among others:

a) *Pride*

Most times, sinners are pricked by their consciences that they are wrong and need to surrender to God's control. However, they cannot bring themselves to do so on account of pride. They resent to be subject to any other authority than themselves! We may give it such elegant names as 'territorial integrity,' or 'fundamental human rights,' or 'right to privacy,' or 'our democratic way of life.'

Look at the Pharaoh's response to Moses during their first encounter. Moses said to him, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" The Egyptian king replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go" [Ex. 5: 1-2]. In deed, arrogance has blinded many people from seeing or knowing the truth of the filth around them. Some

people no longer see the need to pray or to respect others just because they have put their trust in money, the god of silver and gold. Secularism has gone into the hearts of some people and they now boast that there is no God.

The truth of the matter is that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” [**Prov. 16: 18**]. Pharaoh fell and never recovered from it. Pride drove Nebuchadnezzar into the life of a beast and insanity for seven years [**Dan. 4: 28-33**]. Satan fell from heaven on account of pride [**Is. 14: 12**]. Therefore, pride is only temporary relief for the sinner!

b) *Material gains*

Most people know quite well that they are living in sin but they are not ready to repent because that will mean giving up material gains, such as position, pecuniary gains or enjoyment. A prostitute who is making a great deal of money from her sex work may be most reluctant to give it up, especially if there is no better option. A corrupt politician will do anything to keep his job so as not to lose the source of his wealth and influence. Two unmarried persons living together would rather continue in fornication with each other than go into the uncertainty of steady sex partners out there.

Do you know how many Moslems and Hindus have refused to give their lives to Christ for fear of social or physical reprisals? Do you know how many divorce lawyers cannot give up their line of practice on account of its lucrative nature?

Again, material gains are only for a time and cannot save where salvation counts [**Matt. 6: 19-21**]. God gives the sinner “the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God” [**Eccl. 2: 26**].

c) *Beyond pardon!*

Some people have concluded that their sins are so bad that they are beyond pardon. They look at their sordid past- full of murders, addiction, and wickedness of every kind. They look at the people that they have hurt beyond restitution. Therefore, they conclude that there is no need to repent or to return to God because they may never be forgiven.

God has assured the sinner, “Come now, and let us reason together;... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” [**Is. 1: 18**]. If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness [**1 Jn 1: 9**]. Peter denied Christ three times; yet, He restored him and made him head of His church [**Jn 21: 15-17**]. Even when it has to do with unforgivable sins against the Holy Spirit, it is possible that you could have, like Paul, done it out of ignorance. If God forgave Paul his sins of

blasphemy and persecution of the early church, He would also forgive you [1 **Tim. 1: 13**]. That is why God promised Israel through Hosea, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them *freely* for My anger has turned away from (them)” [**Hos. 14: 4**].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that we have no better choice than to give up! Firstly, defeat is inevitable because you cannot fight against God and win. The prophet Hosea reminded the people of Israel that Assyria could not save them, neither could they any longer say to the works of their hands, “you are our gods,” for it is only in the Lord God that the fatherless finds mercy [**Hos. 14; 3**]. Secondly, returning to God is the only wise thing to do. Hosea put it succinctly as follows [v. 9]:

Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them, for the ways of God are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

The Prodigal Son could not find success or restoration until he had returned to his father, repentant, wise and prudent [**Lk 15: 11-22**]. Finally, there is peace in returning to God from a life of sin. Speaking through Isaiah, God said to the people of Israel [**Is. 30: 15-16**]:

In returning and rest, you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength; but you would not. And you said, ‘No, for we will flee on horses.’ Therefore, you shall flee! And, ‘We will flee on swift horses.’ Therefore, those who pursue you shall be swift!

So, since we cannot defeat God, we have no better choice than to give up to Him. The real question that we then face is “When?”

3. When to give up!

As long as God has given us the free will to choose what to do, it is not everyone who will give up as early as possible. For example, Samuel knew God in childhood whereas the good thief gave up to Christ at Calvary at his point of death [**Lk 23: 39-43**]. In general, people tend to give up under one of the following circumstances:

a) *At the point of vindication*

Some people hold on tenaciously to their (unrepentant) ways under the guise that they are right and will one day be vindicated. For example, strong believers of other faiths believe that their view of God is right and that they will be proved right when they get to heaven! Some atheists hold on to their belief, hoping to see a void after death.

Unfortunately for people in this category, vindication is indeterminate and may not turn out as they expect. For example, what if the unbelievers die and find Jesus at the judgment gate? Can they come back to earth to make amends? In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man looked up from the tormenting fires of Hades and saw the poor man Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. He begged for water to quench his torment but Abraham told him that the chasm between them would not permit that. He then pleaded for Abraham to send word to his five brothers on earth to give their lives to God. Abraham replied that they already had Moses and the prophets; "let them hear them." Finally, the rich man pleaded that his brothers would repent if somebody from the dead could talk to them. Abraham told him that if they would not hear Moses and the prophets (i.e., the Scriptures), neither would they hear anyone even if he came from the dead [Lk 16: 19-31]. Therefore, it may be too late to give up at vindication.

b) *At the point of defeat*

Some people will never give up until they are defeated. However, a defeated person may not have control over the terms of settlement. For example, after ten plagues had been inflicted on Egypt, including the death of Pharaoh's firstborn son, he sent for Moses and said to him, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said... and bless me also" [Ex. 12: 31, 32]. Bless you? The God and His prophet that you had derided to bless you?

Do you want God to defeat you before you repent? It may not come the way you expect. It could be by way of public disgrace or an incurable disease. Is that what you want?

c) *At the point of compromise*

Some people would prefer a 'negotiated settlement' where both parties gain something. They think that sin can be laundered and made acceptable in the interest of political correctness. With God, however, there is no compromise "for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?" [2 Cor. 6: 14, 15]. You are either hot or cold because if you are lukewarm, Christ will spew you out of His mouth [Rev. 3: 15-16]. Therefore, there is no half-way house in this matter!

d) *In due season*

There is a time for everything, "a time of war and a time of peace" [Eccl. 3: 1-8]. There is due season for you to give up and return to God. It is *now*! Remember the rich fool who wanted to expand his estate without God in his

heart. God said to him, “Fool! *This night* your soul will be required of you” [Lk 12: 35-40].

The Psalmist says [Ps. 95: 7b-11]:

***Today**, if you will hear His voice; do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me: they tried Me; though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So, I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.*

4. Conclusion: Christ will soon return!

Your time has already run out. You are growing older each new day and it is by God’s grace that you woke up this morning. It is to give you the last chance to repent and give your life to Christ. Sin is no longer fashionable for you! You may never have Paul’s dramatic experience of Jesus on the way to Damascus. Jesus is right now standing by the door of your heart and knocking. If you hear and open, He will come in and sup with you and you with Him [Rev. 3: 20]. But, if you will not hear that gentle tap, He has also warned you that you can keep doing whatever you are doing right now- unjust and filthy or righteous and holy. But, He will soon return “to give to everyone according to his work” [Rev. 22: 11-12].

Know when to give up. It is now!