

# HOPEFULNESS IN HOPELESSNESS: A HERMENEUTICAL APPLICATION OF ROM 4:18 TO NIGERIAN SITUATION

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## Abstract

Nigeria is best described as a clay-footed giant. She is the most populated nation in Africa. She is advantaged and naturally blessed with rich minerals. Yet, she is a nation of two contraries: classed as a nation with happiest people and yet one of the most corrupt in the world. Politically, the civil war of 1967-1970, military coups, formation of political parties are all efforts to set our nation on the right track. Economically, several borrowing from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the different economic policies like Austerity measure, Structural Adjustment Programme policies are all stakes to wake the sleeping giant. Religiously, the story is not different. Because of the crushing hardship bedeviling our nation, some have created imaginary God and are living in utopian world. Most so called Men of God seize the opportunity to loot the already wounded flock through prosperity preaching and false promises in the name of prophecies. In the maze of these man-made problems, the repercussion is obvious. Man is still the victim. Many get poorer. Demographically, there seem to be more deaths than births in Nigeria today. The living tends to act very wickedly towards others. There is scarcely genuineness in dealings and life. There is no assurance of trust. Nigeria portends the imagery of failed hope. This paper draws from the exegesis of Rom 4:18 to encourage Nigerians to rise in hope and take their destiny in their hands. The paper believes that hope is not lost. Individuals only need authentic understanding of God and a non-risk free challenging of himself to survive rather than empty trust in the government and deceptive religious prophecies.

## Introduction

The Jewish psychologist Victor Frank (1992) observed during his time at Auschwitz that people who lost all hope were the first to die. He writes:

Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner . . . had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. Instinctively some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own. It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future—*sub specie aeternitatis*. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task. . .

The worst evil that can befall man is to lose hope. Failing nations and cultural decline have made nation building a major concern in our world today. There is no shortage of persons and ideas willing to tackle the challenge. Communism, socialism, monarchism, dictatorship, democracy, theocracy and even religions are all efforts to solving this problem, yet none have found the hidden key to building a flourishing nation.

Today, all nations are struggling with their own problems. From Egypt to Morocco, Libya to Tunisia, Iraq to Afghanistan, and from Bosnia to Biafra, mankind has watched nations struggle, and has sought to rebuild them. There have been records of revolutions religiously and politically. Some have taken to arms, often branded rebels and at times terrorists. Mankind's record is one of failure. Nigeria is not shielded from this malady. She is a nation of two contraries: classed as a nation with happiest people and yet one of the most corrupt in the world. Efforts have been made and are still being made to rebuild decadent Nigeria. Politically, the civil war of 1967-1970, military coups, formation of political parties are all efforts to set our nation on the right track. Economically, several borrowing from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the different economic policies like Austerity measure of the Shagari era, Structural Adjustment Program of Ibrahim Badamosi Babaginda and the most recent privatization policies are all stakes to wake the sleeping giant. Religiously, the story is not different. Today, Nigeria seems to record the greatest number of sects and religions than her

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neighbours. Because of the crushing hardship bedeviling our nation, some seem to look up to God for solution. Some have created imaginary God and are living in utopian world. Most so called Men of God seize the opportunity to loot the already wounded flock through prosperity preaching and false promises in the name of prophecies. The menace of Boko Haram, face to face with the fall in oil prices, unconcerned frivolous leaders and frivolous worldliness of most citizens are all evils facing the common Nigerian man. In maze of all these, St. Paul challenges us with the life of Abraham who hoped against hope. This article draws on the exegetical interpretation of Rom 4:18 to a hermeneutical implication for the Nigerians. It calls on Nigerians not to lose hope but to sit up and do something for the future is still brighter.

### **The Meaning of Hope**

Etymologically, it is connected to the Hebrew roots *qāwāh*, *yāhal*, and *bāṭah*. Translators have rendered these in Greek to mean *elpizō*, *elpis*, *pepoitha*, *hypomenō* and in Latin as *spero*, *spes*, *confide*, *sustineo*, *expecto*.

Léon-Dufour (1988) teaches that:

To speak of hope is to call to mind the place the future holds in the religious life of the people of God. The future was to be one of happiness to which all men are called (1Tim 2:4). God's promises gradually revealed to His people the splendor of this future, a reality in this world but in better country – I mean, the heavenly one (Heb 11:16). It will be eternal life and men will be like God (1John 2:25; 3:2).

Religiously speaking, Hope is confidence in God and His faithfulness. It is faith in His promises that guarantees the reality of this future (Heb 11:1). Hope is different from faith in that while the

later is of the present, the former is futural. It awaits fulfillment. It is visionary in orientation but needs faith to bring it to reality.

In ordinary parlance, hope is founded on a belief in the realization of a plan or desire. It means to desire with expectation of fulfillment. It opens out towards the future and sustains the whole life with dynamism.

### **Hope in Extra-Pauline Biblical Thoughts**

The OT shows that from the beginning of times, God never left man without hope. This is evidenced in the promises He makes to man after the fall (Gen 3:15; 9:1-17). Biblical hope really begins with Abraham. In Gen 12:1 Abraham is promised a future full of prosperity, children impossible to count. His hope and indeed that of the entire Israel originally centre on earthly prosperity. Exod. 3:8.17 talks of the land flowing with milk and honey. Gen 49; Exod. 23:27-33; Lev 26:3-13; Deut 28 contain promises of prosperity considered by the Israelites as blessings (Gen 39:5; 49:25) and gifts (Gen 13:15; 24:7; 28:13) and not necessarily as an ethic of religion. This is why material goods must be sacrificed unhesitatingly when faith to God demands it (Josh 6:17-21; 1Sam 15).

In the OT especially in the prophetic writings, Hope as a religious concept rests on God. The prophets seem to purify the materialistic tendency of the pentateuchal hope and posit God as the foundation of the hope of Israel (Jer 14:8). He is also the hope of the individual Israelite (Ps 71:5). He who hopes in man is cursed (Jer 17:5) while the one who hopes in God is blessed (Jer 17:7). One must hope in Him even when he seems to hide His face (Isa 8:17) or withdraw His favour (Isa 26:8). His past deeds (Gen 15:7) give confidence in His power to fulfill His promise (Gen 17:8; Exod 3:8.17; 6:4; Deut 1:8). Thus, in the Pentateuch, it is the hope of a great people and land promised to the patriarchs. With the Assyrian deportation of the Northern Israelites in 721 BC and the famous Babylonian exile of 587 BC, hope was put to a new test (The test was not given without warning that hope for the day of the Lord was foolish since it would be a day of judgment and not deliverance (Amos 5:18). In the disaster, Israel hoped on God to open a door of hope because of His

unfailing love (Hos 2:17; Jer 29:11; 31:17). The new hope could rest on a new covenant written in human heart as in Jeremiah (Jer 31:31; 32:38) or on His promise to remember His covenant as in Ezekiel and Isaiah (Ezek 16:59; Isa 55:3).

The OT's hope falls short with death. The living has hope but when death comes, hope is lost Isa 38:18; Ezek 37,11 shows the despair of the exiled Israel; Job lost all hope at his terminal sickness (cf. Job 6:11; 7:6; 17:15). But even at this, some prophets like Isaiah believe that at such times, hope is hidden from sight (Isa 8:16ff) but would not vanish. A remnant would be saved so that God's plan would continue (Amos 9:8ff; Isa 10:19ff). Thus at the moment of chastisement, preaching of future filled with hope (Jer 29:11; 31:17) breaks in upon Israel (Jer 30-33; Ezek 34-48; Isa 40-55) for her permanent consolation.

In the NT, Jesus becomes the fulfillment of Israel's hope with his proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God in the world (Matt 4:17). Contrary to the expectation of the Jews, his kingdom is a spiritual one accessible only to faith. Thus for the NT, Israel's hope can only be fulfilled if and only if she renounces the material aspects of her expectation. Jesus requires his disciples to accept suffering and death as he did (Matt 16:24ff). In other words, the realized kingdom is also yet to come. Thus hope continues but with a new orientation toward eternal life (Matt 18:8ff), towards the parousia and eventual reward of every man according to his deeds (Matt 25:31-46). In this case, Jesus remains the hope of the church as she is strengthened in her hope by his promises and ever abiding presence (Matt 28:20). It is an assured hope in faith focusing on the Master's return (Acts 1:11; 3:20). It is a future at hand (James 5:8; 1Thes 4:13ff; Heb 12:18ff; 1Pet 4:7) and yet surprisingly delayed (2Pet 3:8ff) but which must come as a thief in the night (1Thes 5:1ff; 2Pet 3:10; Apoc 3:3). It calls for vigilance and hopeful patience in trials and sufferings (James 5:7; 1Thes 1:4ff; 1Pet 1:5ff). Because of the anticipated future glory (2Cor 4:17), the hope is joyful even in the midst of sufferings (1Pet 4:13). It therefore engenders seriousness (1Thes 5:8; 1Pet 4:7) and detachment (1Cor 7:29ff; 1Pet

1:13; Tit 2:13). The NT teaching on hope furthers beyond patience to give prayerful waiting and fraternal love (1Pet 4:7ff; James 5:8ff) anchored firmly in the world to come (Heb 6:18) as another key to steadfastness in a hope sure to be realized.

### **Paul's Doctrine of Hope**

Paul's spirituality and wealth of thought on hope is of immense contribution to the church's common treasure on the subject matter. He anchors his teaching on the Christian eschatological belief taking it to its logical conclusion. Christian life in the world is not in vain. The Christian always lives in hope. In Rom 8:23, Paul teaches that we are groaning and waiting in hope for the redemption of our bodies. In 1Cor 15:51 he believes that our bodies shall be transformed (Cf. also 1Thes 4:13-18) and resurrection is the hope of every believer. Not to believe in resurrection for Paul is to be without hope (1Thes 4:13; 1Cor 15:19; Eph 2:12). Despite his frailty, man must hope against hope like Abraham (Rom 4:18-25) and by persisting in doing good he hopes for a glorious reward (Rom 2:7ff).

Paul sees these promises as fulfilled in Christ (1Cor 1:20). Thus the awaited glory is a present reality (2Cor 3:18-4,6) though invisible (2Cor 4:18; Rom 8:24). Through baptism, the Christian has died and risen with Christ (Rom 6,1-7; Col 3,1) in the spirit whom he has received as a pledge (2Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:4) and the first fruits (Rom 8:11.23) of the world to come. Thus all bounds to hope are removed (Rom 15:13). God has given the grace of justification to men whom Adam dragged to death. Through solidarity with the Son, man is lead to life (Rom 5). This is the basis of Christian hope. It is founded on love that can never be taken away from the Christian. It is this Christian hope that gives dynamic strength to struggles in the race to eternal life (Phil 3:13ff).

### **Exegetical Interpretation of Rom 4:18**

We shall limit our interpretation only to a section of this verse that really has direct bearing on the theme of our essay, namely, o|j parV evlpi,da evpV evlpi,di evpi,steusen. Translators have many renderings for this passage. Hays (1985) indicates that the o|j clause,

an adjectival relative pronoun masculine singular followed by a proof text, parallels Rom 4:16-17. Immediately after the preposition *par* Paul adopted a literary device “*homoioprophereon*” (meaning successive words beginning with the same letters or syllables. It can also be seen as *acrostichion* cf. Bullinger 2005) to play on the word *evlpij* to form an *epimone* (Bullinger 2005). The repetition and literary contrast give a good sound in the ear and also carries the force of emphasis to make his point clear. In classical Greek thought, such repetition carries the force of uncertainty because of fear of evil. In the OT, hope is something fundamentally different from fear. It is expectation of good. Bultmann (1995) believes that it is closely allied to trust, trustful hope and confidence in God. It connotes the sense of Ecces 9:4 that once there is life there is hope. In the OT’s understanding, there is no neutrality of expectation. It is radically distinguished from fear of the future. It has the idea of trustful yearning with emphasis on patient waiting on God (Isa30:15).

In this passage therefore, one can infer that Paul plays on the OT idea of hope of the Greek background. It is so in the sense that against Greek understanding characterized by uncertainty and fear of the unknown, Abraham’s faith was a firm confidence in God as the one who decides the future according to His promises. The passage embraces the three basic elements of hope: expectation of the future, trust and patience. Another striking point to note is the use of the two prepositions: *para* and *evpi,*. Moxnes (1980) notes that both prepositional forms with *evlpij* would be familiar to Greek speakers of his time. Dunn (1988) explains that the second use of *evpi,* steusen in two verses echoing Gen 15:6 draws attention to the nature of Abraham’s faith itself as the exposition moves into its final stage. Thus, our passage is better rendered as “who for hope on hope believed” meaning that in the absence of controllable factors, Abraham cast his trust in the divine future who surely and certainly controls all according to His promises. He has a desire for the good promised and hoped to get it.

Cranfield (2001) gives a further elucidation on our subject matter based on his understanding of *parV evlpi,*da. He says that the

expression can mean either “beyond hope” (praeter spem) or against hope (contra spem). The former means that Abraham believed God at a time when it was no longer a human possibility for him to go on hoping. He has exceeded the limit of human possibility in hoping and to this human level, he has lost hope. This is understandable considering the fact that Abraham hoped for centuries already without realizing the object of his hope. The promise in Gen 15:5 is substantially a repetition of Gen 12:2 and according to Gen 12:4 and 17,1 the first promise was made a quarter of a century earlier before the repetition in Gen 15:5. If so, then parV evlpi,da connotes the idea that Abraham has hoped and waited for too long without realizing the hope and thus has really exceeded the elasticity of human hope. His continued hoping is therefore a defiance of human calculations. It is contrary to all human expectation (cf. Bauer 2000). It is against this background that Wesley (1933) gave a poetic rendering of the passage thus:

In hope, against all human hope,  
 Self-desperate, I believe ...  
 Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
 And looks to that alone;  
 Laughs at impossibilities  
 And cries: It shall be done

evpV evlpi,di evpi,steusen clause adds a force to our understanding of the passage. Bauer (2000) interprets it to mean ‘in hope’. It gives the passage a force of belief in the hope. Contrary to human level of hope, Abraham continued to believe that his hope would come to fulfillment with some reason for the confidence and expectation. His reason for continued hoping is founded on the fact that the promise was made by God -eivj de. th.n evpaggeli,an tou/ qeou/ ouv diekri,qh (Rom 4:20). In order words, Abraham has every reason to waiver in his hope having waited for too long and was well on in years together with the hope. His trustful confidence in God made him continue to live in hope that the promise would be surely fulfilled. One can say that in Rom 4:18 Paul paradoxically teaches that where we can no longer count on controllable factors, we have

to trust in the divine future. This type of hope is not based on that which is visible. In fact in 2Cor 4:18 Paul believes that hope cannot relate to that which is seen because everything visible belongs to the sphere of the flesh. He thus emphasizes the element of patient and trustful waiting on God (Cf. 1Cor 13:7; 15:9; Phil 1:20). This confident waiting on God is also part of faith. Hence Paul's adoption of *evpi, steusen*. Though man's reasoning may not support it, though the limits of controllable options must have been exceeded, God's promise is always a sufficient reason to live in hope.

### **Hermeneutical Application to Nigerian Situation**

A look at the years after our independence reveals a ratio of failures than successes. The spate of corruption in our country, the carnage on our very bad roads, the carelessness and frivolous worldliness of civil servants, the gory stories during campaigns, the corruption in our judicial system, political god-fatherism and dilapidated structures coupled with economic hardship tend to picture Nigeria as a failed nation, a nation without future, a country without hope. One does not need a lexicon to learn most of these heart rending facts.

Going back in our memory lane, one remembers when Nigerian Telecommunication was excellent. One can make international calls and receive messages by fax. Today, our Telecommunication is dead. Our postal system is nothing to write home about. Even our oil sector, the bedrock of Nigerian economy is in total fiasco. In a country rich in oil, people line up in queue to buy a gallon of kerosene. Yet individuals have enjoyed fuel subsidies for years. The conditions of our refineries are not worth being mentioned. To say the least, Nigeria is rotten and so Nigerians are dying because of anxiety, fear and frustration. Crime is on the increase. Rather than addressing some of these salient issues, our senators talk about jumbo pay, abortion rights, the same sex marriage and other trivial matters. Indeed corruption in Nigeria is a serious contagious disease that has endemically and indirectly involved every Nigerian, quite irrespective of one's position and upbringing, while the ability to avoid it is a sacrifice yet to be

cultivated by Nigerians. According to Momoh (1991) the twin engine of the machinery of corruption and bribery are the only things that operate smoothly and efficiently across the country. Corruption is not new in Nigeria. It is as old as Nigeria's independence. Odey (2001) did not mince words when he observes that:

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's regime did not see it until the military struck in 1966. Yakubu Gowon did not see it either until he also was removed from office. Murtala Mohammed saw it, tried to do something about it. But they killed him before he could succeed. Obasanjo himself did not feel the pinch of it when he ruled Nigeria first. Today, corruption is his albatross. Muhammadu Buhari saw it as a great threat to Nigeria. He tried to do something about it, but failed partly because fighting corruption in Nigeria is not an easy task and partly because Ibrahim Babaginda who ousted his regime felt that Nigeria could not live without corruption.

The water became muddy from the top. Since the centre could not hold, things started falling apart. The system encourages corruption such that as Achebe (1983) notes that keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam. The cankerworm pervades all sections of Nigeria, ranging from governmental bodies to religion and individuals. Ugwu (2002) bluntly describes the Nigeria's society as being in a very serious state of moral, social, political, economic, legal and educational decay because of corruption. The root cause of the problem is leadership. We lack the identity of true leadership. George Ehusani in an article in the Guardian of Wednesday, November 15, 2004 mentioned that:

...as long as we remained saddled with visionless leadership, corrupt leadership, leadership without moral principles, leadership without responsibility,

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and leadership without discipline, so long shall we remain a bumbling giant holding only a basket of potential force.

It is in the same line of thought that D. Anele quoted by R.N. Okoye (2006) lamented that:

...as a people, we have been singularly unlucky to have leaders with morality quotient of alley cats. They tell us to avoid corruption, to tighten our belts and make sacrifices for a better tomorrow. But instead of being role models by practicing what they preach, our leaders steal public funds, sell our national assets to themselves for peanuts, and live the kind of lives that deserve the guillotine...

General Dwight Eisenhower, the man behind the brilliant D-Day invasion plan that initiated the Allied victory in World War II, once said, "A plan is nothing; planning is everything". The most frightening and common mistake Nigerian leaders make is to have no plan or template to follow before election, during tenure or even after. What we have witnessed in years are leaders without vision of the destination they want to saddle the canoe of our nation. They just come and go with nothing to show. The only plan we are sure they have is how to rig and win another election or prolong their stay. Without a solid, strategic alignment between the goals, people and resources there is bound to be loss of identity of true leadership. A true leader is goal oriented and vision directed.

Again, leadership in Nigeria is not service and people directed. There is rather a constant clash of ego. We are practising democracy and yet no one can challenge the presidency and get free with it. It is either you swim with him in his direction or your political ambition will be threatened. A true leader is always part of the led. He identifies with them and in this way knows their problems and the ones to address.

Hesitancy is a powerful enemy of progress. People expect their leader to be action oriented. A true leader is courageous. The case of Nigerian leaders is always a fulfilment in breach. Second Niger Bridge for example and constant power supply has been recurrent topics both in the Upper House from the time of Olusegun Obasanjo. Until date, the situation is even worse. The Niger Bridge has dilapidated more and power is yet to improve.

One of our leadership crisis is failure to lead especially in periods of crisis. The mistakes of leadership necessitated the avoidable Nigerian civil war from 1967-1970 that cost Nigeria eminent sons and daughters. The effects are still here with us today. The oil rich Bakassi Peninsula which Nigeria lost to Cameroun is glaring sign of leadership failure. The menace of Boko Haram sect still handled by kids gloves by our leaders while lives and properties are lost daily demonstrate lack of identity of true leadership.

One of the hallmarks of leadership identity is readiness to sacrifice. In the time of Shehu Shagari the Nigerian citizens were greeted with the austerity measure. Lots of money were borrowed from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). People were pleaded with to endure and sacrifice. General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in his own tenure introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Most of these terms sound so good to the ear. The fact is that not only were the meanings not well communicated to the grass root, the citizens are yet to see the benefits.

Religiously, the story is not different. Today, Nigeria seems to record the greatest number of sects and religions than her neighbours. Because of the crushing hardship bedeviling our nation, some seem to look up to God for solution. Some have created imaginary God and are living in utopian world. Most so called Men of God seize the opportunity to loot the already wounded flock through prosperity preaching and false promises in the name of prophecies. Truly, Nigerians are witnessing a seemingly hopeless turbulence in their history.

Rom 4:18 is both a call to live on in hope and a call to action oriented hope. Abraham did not keep his hands folded, waiting only on God. In Gen 16:3-4 at the behest of Sarai, Abraham slept with his maid to get a child. Also, the bible did not say that Sarai conceived

without sleeping with Abraham. This means that as Abraham waited patiently on God, he did his own part. Nigerians must not lose hope. There is light at the end of the tunnel but a lot depends on us the citizens. The apparent hopeless problems summarized above are all stakes to wake the sleeping giant. Reflecting on the provisions of Gen 1:26-28, the researcher sees man as the architect of his success or failure. God created man in his image. If this is accepted as true, then man must be a worker to transform nature to suit his needs just as God whose image he is worked to bring into existence all that is. Looking at the way our people read, believe and apply biblical passages, it is like an average man in Nigeria gets himself extricated from his responsibilities and expects God to do what he would have rather done himself.

There is no day in the week that we do not have one crusade or religious program or the other going on here and there. Different prayer centers with the same mode of operation function in different days of the week. Gullible and less informed people end up going from one center to another and end up doing nothing else for the whole week. This is apart from lengthy prayers giving to them already by these 'miracle working' pastors. Evidently, this is not biblical teaching. In fact, St. Paul one of the greatest writers and preachers of the New Testament even with his incomparably great faith and unequalled love for God and the Gospel made himself a tent maker. He depended on the works of his own hands for survival. He did not mince words in his condemnation of idleness. He enjoined all to get something doing and ordered those who do not work not to eat. In 2Thes 3:6-12 he says:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil

and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If anyone will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.

Looking at the quotation above, it becomes clear that hard work is not only part and parcel of the Christian vocation, it is a necessary demand of his faith. It is like the Christians now look on to God to do everything and this explains they spend hours in prayer houses looking prophecies and visions and leaving off their part of the duty. If the bible is not properly interpreted and applied, we end up having false and pharisaic type of religion. Such type of religion created Feuerbach's imaginary God. People create their own God with their imagination and then turn round to worship him. With this, the religion turns out to become an opium of the people in the terms of Karl Marx instead of a way that will challenge man to realizing his dreams and enjoying this world with the hope of still continuing the enjoyment in eternity. Thus, this researcher without repudiating religion, relies on exegetical and analytical theories as the theoretical frame work to redirect his audience to a proper reading, understanding and application of the Bible to real life in order to realize their dreams and so build a great, enviable and lasting nation. It is by doing this that our people shall transcend what Frazer (1911) calls the level of magic to the level of science without which we can never have true religion.

In order to keep their dreams a life through hard work, certain habits must be imbibed by every average Nigerian, namely:

i. *Developing and following one's priorities.*

If a leader does what he must only when he is in the mood or when it is convenient, he is not going to be successful. As a leader, one has little time. All he needs

is a plan. If one can determine his priorities and free himself from everything else, it becomes easier for him to follow what is important and this is the essence of discipline.

ii. *Make disciplined lifestyle your goal.*

Self-discipline is not just one time event. It has to be a lifestyle. Developing systems and routines especially in crucial areas of your long term growth and success is the best way to cultivate the habit of self-discipline.

iii. *Challenge your excuses.*

Elimination of any tendency to make excuses helps one imbibe self-discipline. Indeed all our faults are more pardonable than the methods we think up to hide them. Do not give yourself any reason not to be self-disciplined.

iv. *Remove rewards until the job is done.*

Any industry that pays equal rewards to its goof-offs and its eager-beavers will sooner or later find itself with more goof-offs than eager-beavers. An undisciplined leader may be in the habit of having his desert before eating his vegetables. This is the main problem with god-fatherism and people awarded contracts in Nigeria.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Feingold (2009) holds that “Human experience shows us that we cannot live without a goal to motivate our action. Without a goal we drift and fall into depression”. In a similar vein, Benedict XVI observes that “Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (*Eph* 2:12). Of course he knew they had had gods, he knew they had had a religion, but their gods had proved questionable, and no hope emerged from their contradictory myths. Notwithstanding their gods, they were “without God” and consequently found themselves in a dark world, facing a dark future. *In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus* (How quickly we fall back

from nothing to nothing): so says an epitaph of that period. In this phrase we see in no uncertain terms the point Paul was making. In the same vein he says to the Thessalonians: you must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (*1 Thes* 4:13).”

The primeval proclamation of the Gospel in the ancient world was perceived as a message of radical hope in a world marked by pervasive despair and uncertainty. Nigeria’s desperation for survival marred each time by unfulfilled promises and frivolous worldliness of our very dishonest politicians, prisoners of impersonal elemental forces must be matched by a resilience in hope, backed by a visionary effort to better ones condition. This is only possible when one keeps hope a life in himself. The virtue of hope is absolutely essential for life. This is a truth that Pope Benedict has greatly emphasized in his second encyclical, *Spe salvi*. In the introduction, he writes: “Hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. . . .

Here too we see that a distinguishing mark of Christians is the fact that they have a future. It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. . . . The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life” (nos. 1-2). Abraham in the text we studied lived in hope by hoping against hope. His hope eventually materialized. We must continue to live in hope, no matter the situation. It must however be tainted by hard work and serious mindedness. Sitting tight and casting blames on leaders who care less can hardly help us realize our hope. It is only a trustful hope in God and unalloyed discharging of our respective duties that can truly actualize our dreams of being a great nation.

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