



*“For when one says, ‘I follow Paul’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe” (1 Corinthians 3:4,5)*

*“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.” (Exodus 20:3,4)*

I am aware that the Nigerian pastor (so-called pastor?) TB Joshua has not been convicted in any court of law and, therefore, some may say that I should not jump to any conclusions. However, the recent BBC report on less than Christian activities happening in his church leads me to make some comments that constantly occur to me when I hear reference to such types of churches.

I have massive concerns about churches, be they Pentecostal mega-churches or smaller ones that depend and focus so much on their minister. As Paul says, the minister should be a servant, not the centre of attention. However genuinely spiritual a church leader is, he (or she?) should not be considered the ultimate authority. That remains, and always will be, in my view, the Bible. The minister, in his leadership role, will from time to time have to make decisions, he will need to guide the congregation in understanding the Bible but none of this should bring focus on the minister. It must always be a

means of glorifying God and building up His church, not the minister's, who is only the servant.

If a minister is inseparable from his church, it strikes me that something is wrong. I am sure that there are times when it is appropriate for the minister or a speaker's face to appear on some promotional activity but is it always necessary?

Sometimes even in traditional churches, too much focus and dependence can be laid on the minister. Respect is important but not grovelling subservience. A Christian leader who taught me a lot over the years, once said that being a leader was not a difference in position or importance but a difference in role within the organisation and I believe there is a lot of wisdom in that. In God's eyes, we are all equal.

Honour our ministers, look after them as best we can but keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus for he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

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Not forgetting that February includes Valentine's Day, not an important day on my calendar (though it is my brother's birthday) but one that has been commercially plugged over the past number of years, here is something on love...

### **Sacrificial love**

At the heart of Christianity is a sacrificial love that goes against our natural instincts. Some people make extraordinary sacrifices for others. In wartime, a soldier might be prepared to die to protect the life of a comrade or a civilian. Police officers and other emergency services might be called to do the same. But Jesus Christ told his followers to love their enemies and to pray for the people who persecuted them. He pointed out that it is easy to love people who love us – but the real challenge is to love those who hate us. Jesus epitomised this counter-cultural attitude when he gave up his life. Christians believe that in being executed on the cross Jesus Christ took the spiritual punishment

due to all people for all their wrongdoing. The Bible book, Romans, says *'Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'*

God sent his own Son to die to give all people the chance to have a relationship with him. The Bible book, John, says *'for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life'*. In the same book, Jesus tells his followers, *'greater love has no-one than this, that his lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you...'*

*'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'*

## **Love and lust**

Love is God's idea. So is sex. It is a physical demonstration of love. Generally Christians believe that the best place for sex is between a man and a woman who have committed themselves to each other for life by getting married. The Bible does not shy away from sex: the book Song of Songs, is full of potent images of intimacy and desire.

Lust is a corruption of true love because it is self-centred. Jesus told his followers it was wrong to even look lustfully at anyone. Christianity teaches that God sets such boundaries, not because he is a killjoy but because he wants the very best for people. He knows the potency of sex and the harm it can do to people and relationships in the wrong situation.

<https://www.christianity.org.uk/article/what-is-love>

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## **Five Ways to Show Christian Love**

In conjunction with actively reaching out to non-believers, living our faith is a powerful example and proof that we live what we speak. When others know by our actions that we are believers, that observation can be more powerful than words.

These are five ways to show Christian love every day:

- **Praying:** Praying for guidance and compassion as you evangelize will strengthen your resolve. Praying for your enemies will prevent hardness of heart during difficult times.
- **Sacrifice:** Sacrifice puts the needs of another ahead of your needs. It may be simple or great, but it always needs to be done humbly.
- **Show Grace:** Showing grace to others by forgiving is an example of the forgiveness Jesus gave us. We promise to forgive every time we pray the Our Father.
- **Giving of Time, Talent and Treasure:** All we have was given to us by God. We are merely stewards of the time, talent and treasure that we have. Our purpose is to be good stewards of what God has given us to advance His kingdom.
- **Sharing the Gospel:** Sharing the Gospel is the hardest part for most people, but it's the best way to show Christlike love.

<https://www.goodsoil.com/blog/how-to-show-christ-like-love-in-your-everyday-life/>

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It just so happens that the period of time, known as Lent also starts on 14 February this year. So let us not forget this component of the Christian year.

### **Practising Lent Traditions**

You can benefit from celebrating Lent even if your church does not formally do so. Here are some of the key elements of the Lenten

season and some of the symbolism that comes with it. Many of these practices can be celebrated both individually and as a community:

- **Purple:** Like Advent, the official color for Lent is purple. Usually, churches that celebrate Lent choose the deepest, darkest shade of purple for this special season. They may also strip their churches bare of some of the usual decorations adorning the walls. Purple is the color of repentance for sins and also symbolizes the state of our souls outside the light of Christ. During this time, pray for those who do not know Christ and for those who have sinned gravely against Him.

**Confession:** As mentioned above, Lent is a penitential season or expressed sorrow and repentance... The 40 days are set aside to examine areas of recurring sin in our lives that prevent us from conforming to God's Will. An excellent way to start an examination of conscience is by praying [Psalm 139](#), verses 23-24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

**Fasting and Prayer:** Fasting is a practice that has really gone by the wayside in many Christian circles. Yet, if done correctly, it can be a powerful time to renew your relationship with God. Fasting can be found in both the Old Testament and the New, with Moses ([Exodus 34:28](#); [Deuteronomy 9:9,18](#) ), Elijah ([1 Kings 19:8](#)), and our Lord ([Matthew 4:2](#)) all participating in 40-day fasts. Fasting is a way of denying ourselves the excesses of life so that we might be more attuned to the Lord's voice. It is also a way of disciplining yourself, strengthening your "spiritual muscles," so to speak, so that when temptations arise in life, you are already used to saying "no" to your desires. And finally, fasting is also a way of participating, in a small way, in the sufferings of Christ and can be particularly powerful when accompanied by prayer and confession.

**Meditating on Christ's Sacrifice for Mankind:** In addition to periodic fasting and prayer, our scriptural meditations typically turn to

the salvation offered to us through Christ's suffering. Read Old Testament Scriptures prophesying the suffering of Christ and the New Testament Gospel accounts.

**Charity/Almsgiving:** A very important element of the Lenten season is becoming aware of not only the suffering and sacrifice of Christ but also the suffering of others. Between now and Good Friday, choose one way you can increase your giving to those in need. It could be through extra financial offerings, donating goods you no longer need or use to charity, or increasing your personal time commitment to a ministry or cause close to your heart.

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### **Knee Polishing**

Let's pray around those two L words, love and Lent

Sunday : let us confess our sins

Monday : how can I love my neighbour?

Tuesday : is there someone or some organisation, I could give money to?

Wednesday : can I share the gospel today?

Thursday : how can I love my family?

Friday : how can I pray more effectively?

Saturday : is there a sacrifice I can make for someone?

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**Who in the Bible knew the most people?** Abraham knew a Lot.

**Which Bible character was the best musician?** Samson—he brought the house down

**What did Adam say to Eve when handing her something to wear?** "Take it or leaf it."

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