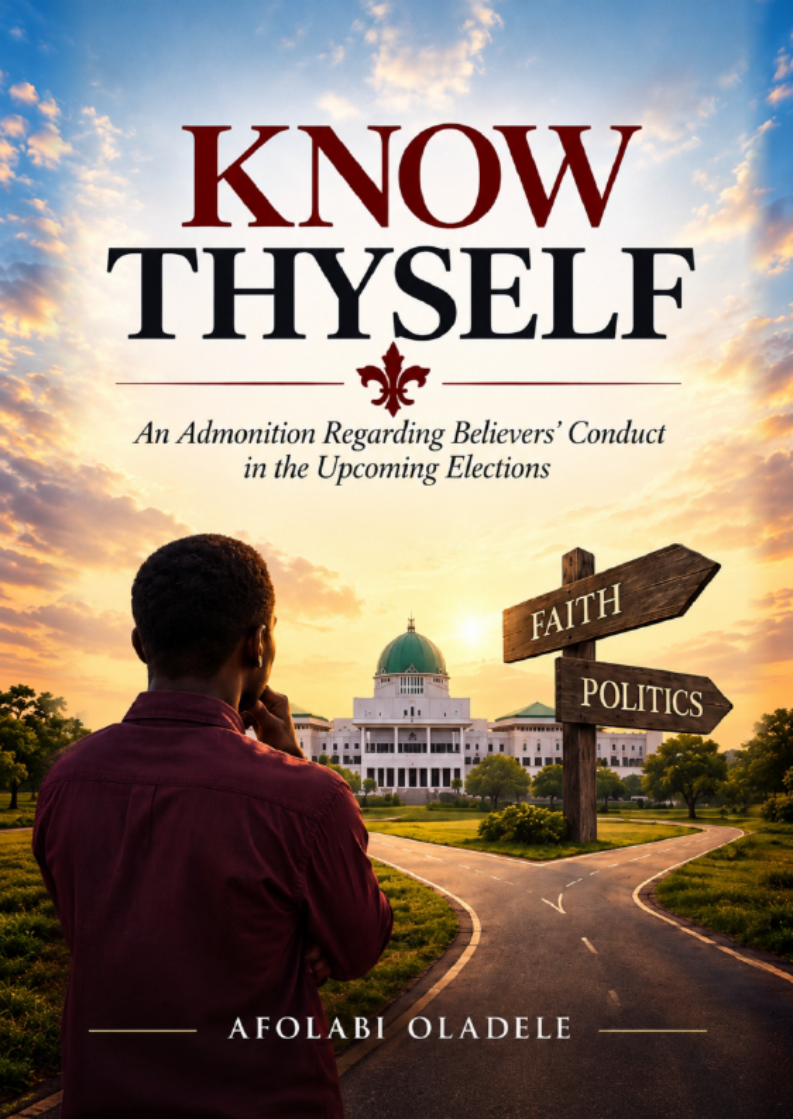
KNOW THYSELF

An Admonition Regarding Believers' Conduct in the Upcoming Elections



AFOLABI OLADELE



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In this write-up, we will consider the nexus and conundrum of **life, faith, and politics for a child of God as we** enter another season of divisive elections in Nigerian political history. The objective is to alert the believer to the pit we have repeatedly fallen into, yet failed to learn from, as agents of the Almighty God in a fallen world of which Nigeria is just one part.

In man's desperation for righteous governance, what is the nexus or contradiction posed by our understanding of the word 'election'? As defined by man or by God? Which should be sought as a priority, and what does that priority mean for your ultimate election?

- Wikipedia **defines election** as 'a group decision-making process whereby **a portion or all of a population or group votes to choose an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office or other position of responsibility.**' This is the world's definition.

- **In the Bible, election means God's sovereign choice of people or groups for His special favour, relationship, or**

purpose. Derived from Greek and Hebrew words meaning to 'pick out' or 'select,' it highlights that salvation and divine calling start with God's initiative rather than human merit.

- In the Old Testament, God chose the nation of Israel as His special people.

- In the New Testament, election applies to individuals chosen in Christ for salvation before the creation of the world based solely on His own will. God chooses people based on His foreknowledge of who will freely place their faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 9:11 states that God's choice is not based on human works or goodness, but on His grace and His purpose to reflect His attributes of being holy, blameless, and to do good works that bring Him glory. But it must be said that while election is solely the exercise of God's sovereignty, the election remains as long as the elect carries out God's purpose - Ephesians 1:11-12; Ephesians 2:10; and Galatians 1:15-16. If the elect fails to perform, he is replaced by God.

The implications of the difference in definition and purpose are so far-reaching that a true believer will exercise self-restraint not to fall on the wrong side in this matter. This leads to a practical issue regarding the believer's position on the matters of election as defined by the world when one considers the implications of the Lord's direct instruction to the disciples in John 17:15-16:

> *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.*
>
> John 17:15–16

What is the implication of this for our conduct when it comes to participation in the choice of rulers in a nation?

Before speaking to the matter of the believer's participation in a process put in place by the world that he is not part of, we should also ask if the casting of votes by any man really guarantees man's desire for an equitable society, or whether something is missing in man's thinking that makes his pursuit an illusion.

This illusion carries negative consequences for the believer who takes on an image that robs him of the ultimate election of His Creator (Romans 8:29).



A Second Illumination: Stewardship and the Kingdom

Let us proceed to a second and even more compelling illumination.

Religion and politics have developed an axiom that goes something like, 'Never discuss religion or politics,' shaped principally by a divide of different positions that many believers have taken on contemporary life issues that are real to day-to-day living!

For any student of history, during the 1960s, a strange theology emerged and enjoyed great popularity throughout Europe and especially South America. It was called liberation theology. Liberation theology came to us through theologians who sought to synthesize historic Christian theology and

Marxist philosophy, which are strange bedfellows indeed. Liberation theology brought a new focus and interest in social justice. Liberation movements abounded from every quarter in our culture as we witnessed an attempt **to marry principles of socialism with the doctrines of Christianity**. Arguments abounded, leading to the conclusion that the Bible doesn't have anything to say about politics, let alone about economic structures. Therefore, the church should not engage in any discussion that includes matters of economics or political theory.

In the same period, we saw a strange twist in how certain quarters understood the doctrine of Scripture. The historic creeds and confessions **affirm that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.** That understanding underwent a subtle but powerful transformation, as it was rendered this way: The Bible is only infallible when it speaks of faith and morals. See how Satan introduces leaven! For clarity, the qualifying adjective 'only' meant to suggest that the sole infallible source of truth we have under heaven is the Bible, as it comes to us from God Himself. The subtle injection, in contrast, was that the Bible is infallible only in

certain distinct areas, such as faith and morals. Still, whenever it speaks of historical, scientific, political, or economic matters, it reveals its fallibility. Therefore, we are not required to submit to its teachings in these areas. It is a subtle shift indeed, but one that changes everything.

Dearly beloved in the faith of Christ, I submit to you that the Bible is infallible in every area since God is its author. He not only reveals to us His truth concerning faith and practice, but included in that is our practice of political activity and economics. The teaching revealed in Jesus' parable of the minas, recorded for us by Luke, is loaded with political and economic significance. The Bible is by no means silent about how kingdoms should rule and how economics should play out. We need ears to hear what it teaches on these matters. No matter what Jesus speaks to, He speaks with authority, and we need to heed Him.

Returning to the tension under which we live in a world of which the believer is advisedly not part: the conflicts between two systems of economics - socialism on the one hand and capitalism on the other - are NOT, repeat NOT, representative of God's way on how kingdoms should rule or

how economics should play out! On one hand, socialism is propagated with humanitarianism, out of the deep and piercing concern for the well-being of those who are poor and oppressed. While prima facie the intentions of those who seek to propagate such systems of economics and political theory seem valid, time has shown that the various forms of socialism have left people experiencing poverty and oppression worse off than ever. Similarly, those who react negatively to systems of capitalism understand that capitalism can easily manifest itself in certain forms through evil motivations of greed, exploitation, and all kinds of mischief.

How are we to respond to these ethical considerations that basically remain the pitfalls for believers about worldly elections? How does the believer respond considering Scripture?

My study of Bro. R C Sproul's exposition of the gospel of Luke brought some interesting propositions that I share in this rather long write-up. He wrote as follows (excerpted):

i. protecting private ownership, as they prohibit all forms of theft and stealing, and

ii. protecting those who have private property from the insidious evil of covetousness and jealousy, where people are motivated by envy and covetousness of other people's property. God takes as dim a view of envy and jealousy as He does greed and avarice. So, how do we sort these things out?

i. particularly those who are poor as a direct result of catastrophes, such as farmers who have experienced a drought, or

ii. people who have disabilities and are unable to physically labour because of their health.

iii. The Bible speaks of God's passionate concern for the well-being of the poor because of calamity.

> *Let me suggest that the Bible* ***teaches a form of capitalism.*** *While there are many different forms of capitalism, the form outlined in Scripture clearly protects the principles of* ***private property and private ownership****. The Ten Commandments, at least in two of them, are directly concerned with:*
>
> *It is hard to speak briefly about the broad categories of socialism and capitalism because they differ in so many fine*

points. It is sometimes difficult to see where socialism ends, and communism begins. One thing these schools of thought have in common, as in all forms of Marxism, ***is a concern for economic equality and the redistribution of wealth so there will be a greater balance between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.'*** *The Scripture reveals that God has a tremendous concern for the poor. He sets forth laws to protect people with low incomes:*

Our culture often assumes that if someone is poor, it is because he is lazy, so he gets what he deserves. We hear that poverty results from idleness and laziness. The Bible does not teach that. However, it does acknowledge that some are poor as a direct result of slothfulness, which is why the Bible condemns laziness while calling us to industry and diligence in our labour (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess.3:6-12). Even before the fall, God created man and woman to be engaged in industry under His authority and for His glory. It is an error to assume that the only reason people are poor is that they are lazy, and equally erroneous to assume that the only reason people are poor is that others are greedy. Sometimes, people are poor because of a catastrophe. Sometimes, because they will not work.

When God called us to be human, He called us to be creatures of industry *(Genesis 2:15). It is interesting that throughout*

> *Scripture, we see the principle of the kingdom of God emphasising the productivity of wise, kingdom-focused labour.*
>
> *So, when I talk about capitalism, I add an important qualifier:* ***biblical capitalism is what we call ['stewardship capitalism].' [Stewardship capitalism does not depend upon the government to take one person's income and distribute it to another person.] That is not the government's role or purpose. We are held accountable to God for our stewardship, and the law of God governs our capitalism.*** *Just as the law of God protects private property, so the law of God governs the acquisition of that private property. We see the illustration and evidence of this in the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11-27.*
>
> — R. C. Sproul, exposition of the Gospel of Luke

By way of introduction to the parable, Jesus was at the house of Zacchaeus, and presumably this parable was spoken in the town of Jericho. As we find in several instances of the Lord's teachings, parables often drew on prevailing situations or places to reveal divine principles. So was it in this parable of the minas.

'Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem,' namely in Jericho, 'and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore, He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return."'

Most commentators agree that this parable probably refers to a historical event which took place 30 years earlier in the Jewish nation's history. In 4 BC, King Herod died shortly before the annual celebration of the Jewish Passover. When he died, he divided his kingdom among his four sons, each of whom received one-fourth of the kingdom and was called a tetrarch. **The son who received Judea, among other areas, was Archelaus. He inherited his authority over this territory from his father. Archelaus was one of the most hated and despised rulers of the Jews during their entire history. Just months after Archelaus' father died, at the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem, Archelaus slaughtered three thousand Jewish worshipers in such a bloodbath that many worshipers fled the city of Jerusalem and ceased their celebration of the Passover. To be formally crowned king of the territory, Archelaus had**

to go to Rome and have the Roman emperor approve his authority by anointing him king. Archelaus went to Rome for that purpose, and a delegation of roughly fifty Jewish authorities also went to Rome to plead against his appointment, saying: 'He's a wicked man, a brutal man. He has slaughtered his own people. Please, Caesar, do not confirm him as king.'

The emperor did not confirm Archelaus as king but allowed him to retain his title as tetrarch. He returned to his territory where he ruled until AD 6, a period of 10 years, after which he was deposed because of his brutality and the people's petitions to get rid of him. At that time, Rome appointed governors such as Pontius Pilate to govern its people. This story was well-known in Jericho, where Archelaus had built an aqueduct and an elaborate palace for his residence in Judea. Every Jew in Jericho was familiar with the story. Jesus ironically picked up on it to talk about someone the people hated going to a far country, where he would be anointed king, as his father had determined.

In this context, Luke tells us at the beginning of the parable that Jesus spoke it because the people thought the kingdom of

God would appear immediately. In parallel to Archelaus' visit to Rome, Jesus said He was going into a far country; He was the nobleman, knowing that the Father would appoint Him king, but not right away. There would be an interim between His departure to the far country and His commission as king.

In that interim, Jesus spoke in terms of stewardship and stewardship capitalism. He spelt out the parable in this way: 'So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business till I come."' He was calling his servants to do business and be profitable, increasing the money entrusted to them. Please note that under God's principle of stewardship, God owns everything. His capital is on loan to us, and the idea is that while our Lord is gone, He has given talents to each of His servants. Originally, the term 'talent' was a monetary unit, and in our vocabulary, it has come to mean an ability or gift that enables us to earn a living.

The talents (as Matthew calls them) or minas (as Luke calls them) were entrusted to each servant, and while the master was away, each servant was expected to multiply the talents or gifts for which they were responsible. 'And so it was,' we are told, 'that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he

then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, to give account so He might know how much every man had gained by trading.' The first servant came and said, "Master, your mina has earned ten minas," and the king said: "Well done. Great job. You've taken my one **mina** (equivalent of three months' wages, showing the connection between money and labour) and you've turned it into ten. I'm going to give you authority over ten cities. I'm going to bless you because you've been productive. You have productively used your gifts and talents."

Then the next servant came, and he said, "Master, I've turned one mina into five minas." The master said: "Good job. It's half as good as the first one, but it's still a good job. You've increased it by a quotient of five times, so you now will have reign over five cities."

What about the next servant? He came, saying: "Master, here is your mina. You gave me one mina. I didn't lose it. I didn't waste it. I didn't consume it. I kept it safe. I dug a hole and buried it in the ground to make sure that nothing was lost.'"

He wasn't prodigal, wasting the entrusted money in profligate living, but disobedient, proffering excuses from a presumptuous heart. He had, at minimum, the option of depositing it for interest! This was the wicked servant who was so intimidated by competition or the fear of loss that he hid his mina in a handkerchief. He said: "I was afraid of you. You're an austere man. I've seen how bloody you can be, and I wanted to make sure not to lose anything of what you've entrusted to me." So the master said: "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You were not productive. Out of your fear, you didn't produce anything, and I trusted you to grow my kingdom.'"

Be Faithful to Your Calling. We live in a culture with an astronomical number of people fighting a losing battle with credit card debt. They spend more money than they make. That is not just foolish; it is evil in God's eyes. **In stewardship, we are to live on less than we make and produce more with our goods. The basic lesson of capitalism is that your money works while you sleep. Instead of wasteful consumption, you invest in industry. That is the economic return, but we are considering something greater than economic concern: the**

spiritual dynamic of the kingdom of God, which is based on the same principle of production. Every Christian is given a ministry. **Every Christian is given a gift by God, and God expects every Christian to be productive in an honest, compassionate, righteous, and diligent way. That is my job. That is your job.**

This departs from the principles of worldly elections, where voters put responsibility on their elected and absolve themselves of individual responsibility! **Stewardship capitalism is uniquely personal and demands complete obedience to the Master to be productive for His kingdom, not for personal splendour and status-seeking.**

On the last day, when the Master returns, those who were unfaithful and unproductive will receive His judgement. That is what we read in Matthew, where the Master said: 'Depart from me. I've given you everything that you have, and you buried it in the ground. You put it under a basket and didn't produce it.' As a child under the principles of the Lord's Prayer, a Christian's duty and privilege is to do everything in our power to increase the ministry of the gospel of the

kingdom of God. Don't be carried away by Satan's instigation and noises of the heathen. We continue.



Two Pillars: God's Rule and the World's Politics

With these two pillars or boundaries clearly set out, namely:

- Election as defined by God is NOT as defined by the prince of this world and man; and
- While believers live in this world, they must understand that the way God rules in matters of economic management as it affects the poor is NOT the same as the proponents of the world.

As we dive deeper, we must understand the construct of the oversight of nations as set out by the Almighty God. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (NLT)

> *When the Most High assigned lands to the nations when he divided up the human race, He established the boundaries of*

> *the peoples according to the number in his heavenly court. For the people of Israel belong to the Lord; Jacob is his special possession.*
>
> DEUTERONOMY 32:8–9, NLT

From the rendition in Psalm 82:1-5 and Daniel 10:13, we see the heavenly court as the great assembly over which the Ancient of Days presides and assigns nations to members of this court with a specific mandate stated in Psalm 82:3-4. The mandate which they failed to carry out brought judgement upon them; judgement yet to be effected. In this context, we see God's overall prevailing sovereignty and delegation – such as we see the prince of Persia who exercises his rule over Persia, acting in rebellion against God; his rebellion directed specifically against Israel as God's people. To the point, the matter of the election of rulership of any nation is not in the power of man's vote! Neither is it decided by your casting of votes! Daniel 7:1-8 demonstrates that there are celestial forces at work, orchestrating the turmoil, the vicious campaigns, and deceptions among the sea of men. Little wonder that those involved demonstrate the character of their father, the father of lies! (John 8:44). Yet believers are also caught in the delusion, being buttered up with promises that only God can

keep. Proverbs 16:33 further affirms that purpose and plans belong to God. He knows what you don't know. **What, then, is the boundary of responsibility of the believer when it comes to election by voting?**

The day after February .... 2027, our country will be mortified with the results and, much like the past, it will be split right down tribal and, sadly, religious lines, except for the populace who are indifferent to all this stuff.

God's foreknowledge of this very moment — and of the text set before us today — is itself remarkable. What matters most is the reach of His care, extending not only to you and me individually but to all of humanity (Matthew 13:44). And the longer one reflects on it, the clearer it becomes that there are two ways of being in the world:

- the way this world operates, and
- the more excellent way of Jesus that does not play by the rules of this world.

His ways are so different from ours — almost startling to witness. Whatever you feel about whoever is elected president

and the retinue of newly elected officials, the deeper question for each of us is this:

- are we handling politics in Jesus's way, or
- in the way the world demands of us?

On both sides of the political divide, everyone needs to hear Jesus's perspective on this matter, because the world would look markedly different if people heeded the words of the perfect Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. Only then will we grasp how radical, and how wonderful, it is to understand and follow His way.



Know Thyself: Identity Beyond Politics

In continuation, I borrow the phrase 'Know Thyself' from a message preached by Bro Daniel Fusco some nine years ago.

The phrase 'man, know thyself' is, in fact, a classical Greek philosophical maxim, often attributed to Socrates, rather than an explicit biblical quotation. The Bible nonetheless contains

verses that encourage similar self-reflection and an understanding of one's relationship with God — namely Haggai 1:5, Psalm 139:23, and 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Plato, writing on the teachings of Socrates — regarded as the father of Western philosophy — held the common view that one of life's central aims is to know oneself.

In many respects, the intersection of life, faith, and politics comes down to precisely this question of identity. Consider your own life: it is the culmination of a matrix of roles we all inhabit. Just as I understand myself through the coming together of these various functions and roles, so do you — whether as a Christian or as one of the many who, while not professing Christian faith, nonetheless believe in something greater than themselves.

You carry your faith-based beliefs, whatever they may be, and to these you add your

- ethnicity,
- family of origin,

- the country you live in, and
- the values you hold.

You may also be:

- single or married, an aunt, an uncle, a grandparent, or none of these,
- employed or not.

Putting all these things together is how each of us arrives at a self-understanding of who we are in this world. Yet not one of these roles was ever designed to occupy the driver's seat of your self-understanding. Unless we remain vigilant, we allow these things — real and legitimate as they are — to seize the wheel of our self-understanding, short-circuiting the very life God intends for us. Amid every role and function we assume in the world, and everything we care about, only one thing must remain the driver of them all. And where politics is concerned, a great many people allow their political persuasion to become a role that hardens into an entire identity of its own. The question, then, is not whether one should vote, but what identity has come to drive that choice.

Anyone following the media — mainstream or social — cannot help but be horrified by the falsehood and ugliness that characterise these discussions. Politics has become:

i. the reason old friendships fall silent,

ii. the reason family members and once-good neighbours are held at arm's length over their support for another candidate,

iii. the reason genuine conversation with those who disagree becomes impossible, and

iv. the reason once-thriving relationships between neighbours have died at the altar of tribal and religious allegiance.

At that point, one recognises how far this role has strayed from its proper place — a distortion so pervasive it has become the norm in Nigeria. It is almost expected that one should cling to one's convictions while despising everyone else. This has nothing to do with the teachings of Jesus, nor does it come anywhere near the purposes He holds for us. This message, then, is offered to help believers who are ignorant of God's will recover a truer sense of themselves:

- who we are, and
- what matters most in helping each of us understand who we truly are.



Render Unto Caesar: Whose Image Do You Bear?

Let us examine Matthew 22:15–22 in detail.

This text reveals that divisive politics — people approaching the same issues from radically different angles — is nothing new. Jesus lived in a world marked by competing beliefs and conflicting ways of understanding life, a world in which people did not get along. There was constant infighting, with people approaching life from irreconcilable positions. The text reveals a deeply divided political climate in Jesus's day, not unlike our own. His opponents made a determined attempt to entangle Him in a political controversy, but He would not be drawn in. He pointed instead to something deeper than the politics of the moment — a lesson for all who call God Father.

Consider what Matthew 22:15 records:

> *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.' So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him and went their way.*
>
> Matthew 22:15–22, NKJV

This confrontation took place at a prophetically significant moment, in the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry. He was in Jerusalem, and those seeking to undermine Him and discredit His work came at Him from every direction.

i. First among them were the Pharisees, the religious elite of the day — the most stringent followers of the Torah, at

least by their own interpretation of it, and in some respects the closest to the Lord in matters of belief. They were rigid, and they aimed to ensure that every Israelite adhered to religion as strictly as they did — an elitist and exclusive circle. They now sought to trap Jesus in His own words — to provoke a statement they could twist into a soundbite, circulate widely, and use to brand Him a fool. Their true aim was to destroy His credibility, ensuring that none would trust Him and none would follow Him. To this end, the Pharisees conspired, dispatching a disciple — tellingly, in the company of the Herodians.

ii. If the Pharisees were staunchly nationalistic and devoutly religious, the Herodians represented the opposite allegiance: supporters of the house of Herod — Herod the Great, Herod Antipas — rulers who, by ethnicity, descended from Esau rather than Jacob, and who governed on Rome's behalf. The pairing is striking. On any ordinary day, the Pharisees and the Herodians stood on opposing sides of nearly every issue. The Herodians accepted Roman rule and benefited from it, since Herod was their patron. The Pharisees despised Roman rule and worked to undermine it at every turn. Yet here, they

> united against a common target: Jesus. It is a familiar pattern — the enemy of my enemy becomes my friend. Two factions that never stood together, that saw the world from entirely different vantage points, now stood united to bring Him down. Their approach was calculated: they came to Jesus and opened with flattery, as recorded in verse 16: 'Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.'

Their praise was designed to lower His guard. Both the Pharisees and the Herodians heaped Him with compliments, hoping that amid the flattery, He might let something careless slip.

Flattery born of selfish ambition is, at its core, a lie — even when the words themselves are true. Their compliments were accurate, but they intended to entrap. This is, in essence, how politics so often operates: it deals in flattering deception, praising people extravagantly while waiting for a misstep to exploit publicly.

Though everything they said about Jesus was true, they did not believe it themselves. Would that this were our testimony in the world — that those who know us could say of us what the Pharisees, however insincerely, said of Christ: that we are true, that our words are trustworthy, that we are people of integrity who say what we mean and mean what we say, who seek with our whole being to walk in truth and to teach the ways of God faithfully. Is that the testimony our lives bear today?

The Pharisees and Herodians were not lying about Jesus, yet they did not believe what they said — their words served only to disguise their true purpose. Beloved, our lives should be lived such that when people observe us, they can rightly affirm that we are true, genuinely seeking to teach the ways of God in truth, since all of us live our convictions openly, whether we intend to or not. Yet at election time, a common refrain surfaces that religion ought to be kept separate from voting. This is a fallacy. Every act of voting flows from some set of faith-based values, whether biblical, secular, or otherwise. No one can prove with certainty that their own belief system is the correct one. Even the atheist votes from a position of faith —

for, as any honest scientist will acknowledge, one cannot prove with absolute certainty that God does not exist. That, too, is faith. But do believers truly understand where God stands on the matter of voting, and what that means for them?

Even secular convictions constitute a form of faith. Everyone brings their faith-based beliefs into the public square the moment they choose to vote. To imagine that one's vote is free of religious or philosophical conviction is a delusion; every voter carries some framework of belief into the decision they make.

The question, then, is whether we — who claim to walk in truth and to teach the ways of God — truly live in a manner that reflects that claim, or whether our lives fall short of the testimony we profess.

Consider next their assertion regarding the Lord's character: 'nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.' Their meaning was that Jesus showed no partiality — He did not treat people differently according to their status. He regarded the Pharisee, the Herodian, the tax collector, the prostitute, and the demon-possessed with the

same measure of truth and grace, because He saw clearly what each of them needed. Do we, in our own day, extend that same impartiality — or do we size people up by their dress, their tribe, their religion, their manner of speech? Jesus's integrity flowed from His singular devotion to teaching the ways of God in truth. Whoever walks in that truth treats every person with love, kindness, and respect. That is Jesus's way.

Proverbs 26:24–25a states:

> *He who hates disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself; when he speaks kindly, do not believe him.*
> PROVERBS 26:24–25A

This proverb warns that some people conceal malice behind pleasant words, using flattery only to obtain what they want. Such people should not be trusted, however kind their words may sound — their flattery ought not to be believed.

Genuine kindness should be constant, not selectively deployed. A kind word offered only when something is wanted reveals not virtue but manipulation.

Their true intention surfaces in verse 17: 'Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus, perceiving their wickedness, replied, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.' They brought Him a denarius, and He asked, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They answered, 'Caesar's.'

This question — whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, a dilemma we might call 'to pay or not to pay' — represented a confrontation, since it forced a choice between two politically dangerous positions.

The Jewish people had lived under Roman rule for some time. Had Jesus affirmed the tax, He would have appeared to endorse submission to Rome, a position that could be construed as a betrayal of Israel's covenant identity and a denial of loyalty to the God of the Bible. Had He rejected it, He would have appeared to incite rebellion against the Roman Empire — a charge that carried lethal consequences. The Pharisees believed they had constructed the perfect trap: whichever way Jesus answered, He stood to lose — either His standing among the people or His life at the hands of Rome.

But hear Jesus in this 'to pay or not to pay' reality. Jesus, perceiving their wickedness, replied, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?'

Jesus was a plain speaker. He called them exactly what they were: hypocrites. Remarkably, no one had briefed Him on the questions in advance, nor had He received any forewarning of the debate to come. He simply knew their plot and called them out on it. "Show Me the tax money," He said; since they wished to speak of taxes and Caesar, let them produce the coin. So, they brought Him a denarius, the very unit of currency in which the tax was paid. He asked them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's."

Had we been holding a Roman denarius from that period, one side would have borne the emperor's likeness with the inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus,' while the reverse would have read 'Pontifex Maximus.'

To a Jewish observer, this coin was saturated with idolatry. The inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus' made an explicit divine claim, since Augustus, Tiberius's predecessor, had been worshipped as a god. The reverse

inscription, 'Pontifex Maximus,' translates as 'high priest.' It becomes clear, then, why this was such a combustible issue in Jesus's day. The coin itself was blasphemous by Jewish conviction, which held that there was no God but the one true and living God; no image of Him should be made, and no other god worshipped or bowed to. Every feature of that coin proclaimed idolatry to a Jewish mind, and it was this very coin Jesus now held before them.

Dear child of the living God, your participation and choices declare which image you carry — God's, who created you in His image and likeness, or the image of the government you have voted for.

Jesus was never interested in surface-level disputes; He always moved toward the heart of the matter. They asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. His response — turning their question of taxation into a question of whose image the coin bore — reframed the entire dispute, driving straight to what truly mattered.

The most famous mention of the denarius occurs in the 'render unto Caesar' episode, recorded in Mark 12:13–17,

Matthew 22:15–22, and Luke 20:20–26. When Jesus's opponents attempted to trap Him with a question about taxation, He asked to be shown a denarius before delivering His masterful reply about giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. The coin in question likely bore the image of Tiberius Caesar and the inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus.'

His answer in verse 21: 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they had heard these words, they marvelled and left Him and went their way' — was breathtaking. To call it brilliant is an understatement. Since they wished to speak of taxes, His counsel stands: pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.

The principal takeaway for the discerning child of God is this: we must bear God's image in the matter of elections.

Your priority is to bear God's image — the direct answer to the question of who defines your identity, who sits in the driver's seat of your life, as discussed earlier. Remember that your claim to sonship, in calling Him Father, is summarised in

Matthew 6:9–10. Every earthly government remains, in some sense, under the dominion of the prince of this world, Satan (Luke 4:5–7); even Christ acknowledged this in that discourse and modelled for us the example to follow (John 14:30). All that we are — our spirit, our soul, our bodies, our wills, our emotions — belong entirely to God.

To bear God's image is where life, politics, and faith truly converge. Though we may appear, in this present age, to hold citizenship in multiple kingdoms, the followers of Jesus must reckon themselves first and foremost as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20; Philippians 2:14–16, NLT/TLB/Message).

The kingdom of God supersedes every kingdom of this world. It is of greater consequence than the kingdom of Nigeria, or any nation whatsoever.

Sadly, we allow a broken world system — one that Jesus came to die for, to redeem, and to buy back — to define us, elevating Nigerian politics above the kingdom of God. Beloved, Jesus died for that sin as well. If you choose to believe the lies of this world and place Nigerian politics above the ethics of God's

kingdom, then you are not, in that moment, walking as a follower of Jesus. Why? Because the ethics of God's kingdom supersede the ethics of every earthly empire, as history has repeatedly demonstrated: earthly empires rise and fall, but God's kingdom endures without end. Where now is Abacha? Shonekan? Buhari?

Biblical history demonstrates that God, in His sovereignty, employs governments for His purposes. While God remains God, your role, whether you vote or not, is rooted in the wise quip: what turns the head? Of course, it is the neck. Vote or do not vote; whatever government stands in place exists for a reason, and all such governments are transient, removed when they fail to serve God's intent.

Nonetheless, there remains a shared responsibility that is God's abiding focus and mandate for the believer, irrespective of one's vote. Romans 13:1–7 echoes the Lord's words to the Pharisees and Herodians, while 1 Timothy 2:1–8 directs the believer's conduct in light of His overriding purpose.

If your only concern is securing your preferred candidate's election, then you are likely not asking the deeper question:

how does heaven touch down on earth? What does that look like? Matthew 6:9–10 tells us that when heaven touches down, all that has been severed is brought together in service of a greater vision.

I fear that the people of God, though we know we are called to live differently, have bought wholesale into the way politics operates. We cannot afford to forget that Jesus is real, and God's kingdom outweighs any transitory earthly kingdom. Can Jesus, who never needs to be elected, become subservient to those who must be continually re-elected, or who serve under term limits?

That same question – whose image and inscription – should turn the discerning believer's mind immediately to Genesis 1:26-27:

> *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them.*
>
> Genesis 1:26–27

Just as the earthly government you are so eager to install bears its own image, you too will bear that image, as happened to Adam in the fall. The Genesis passage reminds you: you carry My image and inscription. While you fix your attention on what a broken system offers, God is working towards something far greater (Ephesians 1:10). To choose the kingdoms of this world over the kingdom of God is to forfeit innocence, resulting in division within His body; a pointed warning, too, to shepherds so swept up in the moment that they instruct their congregations on whom to vote for.

Indeed, man was created as an image-bearer of God, until the fall in the Garden of Eden caused sin to warp that original image. I became a warped image-bearer of God, and so did you, until we believed in Jesus. And every day since, God has been saying: I want to reshape you in Christ; I want to change who you are; I want to do a work in your life. This is why Jesus matters so profoundly. He came to restore God's good image and inscription to its rightful form and practice.

If you are in Christ, living as a citizen of the kingdom of God, you are declaring: 'I want heaven to touch down in my life, here and now. It does not matter whether it concerns my

career, my home, or my politics. What matters is that heaven touches down because I am a citizen of a kingdom, and my heavenly citizenship governs my earthly citizenship, not the reverse.'

God calls you to be a clear image-bearer of Him and His kingdom in this world. The way Jesus responded to those who sought to entrap Him stands as a landmark lesson in how we ought to conduct ourselves in this season of heated and often ungodly political conflict.

What I am advocating is this: let your faith and trust in Jesus temper and modulate your political convictions, so that you do not render yourself unable to serve as an instrument of Jesus's peace in the world. This is not a question of whether a Christian should vote. What we are witnessing instead is Christians trading away the counsel of Galatians 5:13–21 (Message/NLT/TLB) for passionate allegiance to their politics.

We must return to the truth that Jesus died and rose again so that we might be His hands and feet in the world. This is a charge we cannot set aside, because under the leadership

presently guiding the world, there is little hope for humanity if the people of God fail to get this right.

I believe Jesus is inviting each of us to be changed, and that transformation must begin with you and me. He wants each of us to take the next step with Him. What is Jesus inviting you into today? How is He calling you to be different from this morning, from yesterday? How is He inviting you to love those you disagree with, to serve those who lack what you have, and to help others in their time of need? How is Jesus calling you to respond?

Will you answer Him and act? For if we are truly the people of God, then we must live as the people of God. And I believe, from the bottom of my heart, that God can transform any of us.

My earnest prayer for us as a people is that we bear God's image in this world. When others observe those who follow Jesus, they would say: I may not agree with them, but they are among the most loving, truthful, peaceful, gentle, and faithful people I have ever known.

Will you allow your life to be the place where heaven touches down, even amid a divisive political climate and a world of competing convictions all vying to become law? Will you be the people of God?

This may not be popular, but I have set the truth before you. Return to your first love, if indeed you are truly saved by Christ. If you are a believer in Jesus, you must begin to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. Say to Him: Lord, I give You my whole life. All that is within me, I offer to You again: my body, my soul, my mind, my emotions, my will. It is all Yours, God. How would You have me live?



My closing thoughts are encapsulated in the following scriptures, recommended for your further study:

i. Matthew 22:15–40. Which image do you carry? Man's warped notion of governance.

ii. Exodus 32:1–6; Exodus 35:3–19; Luke 22:24–30; John 12:4–7, 12–16

iii. Romans 8:29

iv. 1 Corinthians 15:47–49 (Genesis 2:7; 3:14; John 3:31; Genesis 5:3; Romans 8:29)

Shalom.

Aoro
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Know Thyself: An Admonition Regarding Believers' Conduct in the Upcoming Elections is a thought-provoking Christian reflection on the intersection of faith, identity, politics, and citizenship.

The book challenges believers to look beyond political loyalties and remember that their primary identity is found in Christ and their citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Drawing from Scripture, particularly the teachings of Jesus, the author explores how Christians should approach elections, political disagreements, stewardship, leadership, and their relationships with others.

At its heart, *Know Thyself* is a call for believers to bear the image of God through their conduct—choosing truth, love, peace, integrity, and faithful service even in a deeply divided political environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Afolabi Rasaq Oladele gave his life to Christ as a teenager through a Lutheran Christian radio programme; an experience that marked the beginning of a lifelong commitment to the Gospel. From his early years as a believer, his walk with God has been marked by consistency, growth, and a deep love for the truth of God's Word.

He began his ministry while studying at the University of Ife and has remained faithful to that calling ever since. As the Senior Pastor of The Christian Brethren Church, Lagos, Nigeria, a role he has served in since 1986, Pastor Oladele brings over forty years of experience in teaching, preaching, and shepherding God's people.

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