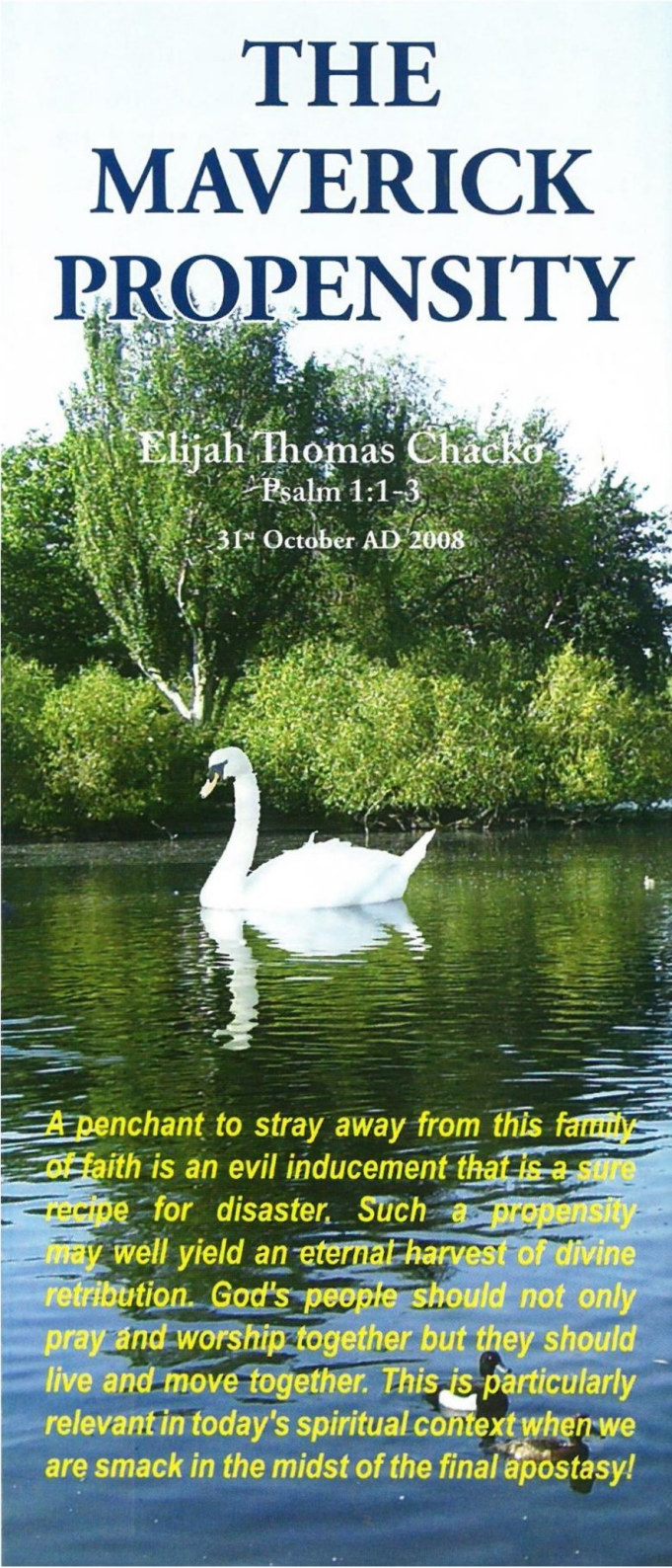


THE MAVERICK PROPENSITY

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Psalm 1:1-3

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A photograph of a white swan swimming in a pond. The swan is in the center, facing left. In the foreground, a duck is partially visible. The background consists of lush green trees and foliage. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery.

A penchant to stray away from this family of faith is an evil inducement that is a sure recipe for disaster. Such a propensity may well yield an eternal harvest of divine retribution. God's people should not only pray and worship together but they should live and move together. This is particularly relevant in today's spiritual context when we are smack in the midst of the final apostasy!

Christians are a communal people. Often collectively we are designated in the Scriptures as a congregation or a priesthood or a flock. Hence the apostle's exhortation: *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is"*.¹

On the other hand, Christians have this longing for solitude and privacy. We are constantly seeking for a closet where we could be alone with God. Meditation and communion with God characterise Christian living and these are best practised in seclusion. It is necessary therefore for Christians to know when to cherish communal ambience and when to retire into the quietness and placidity of isolation. It is true that our strength and salvation constitute in sanctifying the seasons of quietness and solitude with devotional exercises. *"In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength"*.² We treasure our devotional sanctuaries so as to maintain our personal communion and fellowship with the blessed Three Persons of the Godhead, even the Father, His eternal Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christians withdraw themselves to seclusion to delight and study the Holy Scriptures, to ruminate and pray; all these are done mostly in isolation without any disturbance, distraction or disruption.

¹ Hebrews 10:24,25a

² Isaiah 30:15b

While we jealously demarcate our own closet seasons in the demanding schedule of our daily affairs, we must not forget that it was God's design right from the beginning of time for His people to abide as a community. Christians are always recognised as a cluster, living as a band of pilgrims. We are a community based people, living together and sharing both our joys and sorrows mutually. Our strength, safety and expediency is to live and move together like a colony of ants ³ or a swamp of bees ⁴ or a flock of sheep. ⁵ Wherefore our aim should be to find a healthy niche and specific role in the communal life of the true church.

One of the fundamental principles behind the commemoration of the Jewish festival of Purim is to remind God's people that our refuge and glory is to convoke as often as we can. ⁶ In the Book of Esther, though God's people were scattered globally, they were urged to muster assemblies of the Jews that lived in their respective vicinities for their defence and security particularly when they were subjected to incessant assails.

The configuration and scope of the visible church can vary, depending on the circumstances and perspectives. It can be the whole nation of Israel as it was in the Old Testament dispensation. It can also be as when God's people were scattered in exile

³ Proverbs 30:25

⁴ Judges 14:8

⁵ Psalm 23

⁶ Esther 9:16, Hebrews 3:13

after the captivity. It could be like the house-to-house pockets which Paul visited and ministered to.⁷ It could even be our immediate family or the clutch of people that we are living with, either within the same premises or within the same neighbourhood. It could be the people of faith in Christ within your province or within the proximate borders that politically define a nation. But the concept of the church visible also holds true even on a global scale. Every member of the universal church is part of the brotherhood and hence our obligations towards and affinity for all of them should be no less than the regard and intimacy Mordecai and Esther had for their fellow Jews in the 127 provinces of the worldwide Medo-Persian empire.⁸

It is our bounden duty to exercise consideration and sensitivity in maintaining our niche and place in the context of the community we are living in. Consider the whole litany of the epistles of Paul the apostle: we observe that he never fails in almost every epistle of his inspired trove to evoke a sense of the brethren's mutual responsibilities and duties, even as he underscores the vital importance of such societies of Christian fraternity. For we are not only a spiritual priesthood, to gather publicly to render worship to God through Christ Jesus, but we are also a royal priesthood to wield a corporate testimony. Together, as a collective

⁷ Acts 20:20b

⁸ Esther chapters 8 & 9

testimony, we are likely to brandish a more elegant and powerful attestation than our individual influence. We are a holy nation, a peculiar people, a chosen generation, a royal and spiritual priesthood, says Peter in his first epistle.⁹ Our Lord Himself underlines it most cogently, *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*¹⁰ One of the aspects that our Lord is at pain to emphasise is the enormous impact mustered by a collective testimony.

Thus the craving to be a maverick or to go solo in this pilgrimage of faith is certainly not a mark of the grace of God. Rather it may be an evident proof of an unregenerate heart, being filled with pride, self sufficiency and covetousness; such vices induce us to veer away from the family of faith. Inevitably it may lead us to violate the doctrine of biblical separation and trespass into forbidden territory. Eventually we make a shipwreck of our faith. The Bible graphically evinces that many a soul are destroyed in this manner. Eve’s wandering away from her husband Adam’s side triggered off the great fall of mankind at the onset of history. Dinah’s impertinence to venture unlawfully without the approval from her family engendered her own defilement and great violence to the rest of society. A reluctance to follow

⁹ I Peter 2:9

¹⁰ John 13:34,35

her husband wholeheartedly coupled with a secret pining for the glitter and glitz of urban environment brought swift retribution to Lot's wife. Lot's own moving away from Abraham proved very costly. Solomon's dalliances with women of strange cultures generated tragic consequences to him, almost wasting the blessed legacy his father, David, had bequeathed to him. Absalom's gradual abandonment from David caused evil to the former, pitting him against his own father. Instead of joining the camp of God's people, Balaam coveted to join the circle of the ungodly rich. Cain's slide down the slippery slope of apostasy commenced when he retreated from Adam's family. Hence, Cain was a vagabond and a fugitive for the rest of his life! We behold the end of adopting such an outlook. Cain built the first city, Enoch, but he became a reprobate as far as his soul was concerned! Esau was not unlike Cain. He went roaming into enchanted grounds and ended up marrying vexatious wives. Whereas Jacob had a burning desire to come home to God's people, Esau was never at home with God's people. Samson had an inclination to flirt with strange women despite the remonstrances of his parents. Eventually he never did quite learn from his embarrassing trail of failures he had blazed; hence he became an easy victim to Delilah, a foreign woman who conspired with a brood of his enemies to betray him. Though his life was colourful and embellished by God's goodness and power, yet Samson often wal-

lowed in bitterness and bile for his flamboyant lifestyle. The Bible is replete with examples of disastrous outcomes of those who slighted the ambience of Christian fellowship. Consider the latter end of those who defected from God's people. John the apostle warns us, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*"¹¹ Those who are prone to stray make themselves a prey to the Antichrist. "*Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me. There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.*"¹² Those who lightly esteem the doctrine of biblical separation will soon be ensnared among the workers of iniquity. They shall land among the dead congregations, where the power of modern Babylon prevails!¹³ These are congregations that condone Scripturally unwarranted doctrines, practices and worship in their midst. Inevitably the ferocious wrath of God will overtake them.¹⁴

The divine purpose to deliver us from this world, sin and Satan is to incorporate us into the assembly of His people. "*Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?... for whosoever shall do the will of My Father Which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister,*

¹¹. I John 2:19

¹². Psalm 36:11,12

¹³. Proverbs 21:16; Revelation 17:5

¹⁴. Isaiah 65:11-16

and mother."¹⁵ It is our Lord Himself who uttered these words. He was not just asserting that blood should not be thicker than truth but the kindredship that is bonded by the Spirit of God is most precious in God's sight. A penchant to stray away from this family of faith is an evil inducement that is a sure recipe for disaster. Such a propensity may well yield an eternal harvest of divine retribution. For our own safety and preservation, we should seek solicitously to abide with God's people. It is imperative therefore to practise biblical separation. The message is particularly directed to the youth. Those who are wise among the youth will resort to the spiritual elders for counsel and directives. This is their wisdom, glory and preservation. Great benefit and blessing will come to them consequently; we remember Ruth, the Moabite lass, who refused to depart from Naomi; behold the blessedness that she enjoyed in her latter days. Be ye not like Orpah who justified her wicked departure with vain excuses. The precarious urge to wander away and loiter about in forbidden territory is a salient yearning of the youth. Curb the propensity to play the maverick lest ye bring great damnation to your own soul and be found on the wrong side of the great chasm in the afterlife.

Even when we travel about, it is good to do so in a company. God's people should not only pray and worship together but they

¹⁵ Matthew 12:48b,50

should live and move together. The Book of Exodus is the story of God's people moving as a host. It is always good to have godly chaperons or companions rather than to go alone in this world. This is particularly relevant in today's spiritual context when we are smack in the midst of the final apostasy! Satan, on the loose for a season, is running amok! Evil is on the break in every compartment of the spectrum of life. It is like the days of Noah when *"the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence."*¹⁶ Never has history witnessed an ungodly deluge of evil as it does today. *"The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves."*¹⁷ And again, *"Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul."*¹⁸ This is the time of the great temptation.¹⁹ It is safe and circumspect to always keep close to the godly.

The propensity to go alone is the trait of a harlot. The harlot with the intent to prostitute herself prefers to wander and stray. Such a spirit tends to whoredom. The whore refuses to submit and enjoy the God-given refuge of God's people. She restlessly yearns for the licence to go alone in the quest to satisfy her lusts.²⁰ Those that despise the refuge provided by the tabernacles of God will

¹⁶. Genesis 6:11

¹⁷. Psalm 93:3

¹⁸. Psalm 124:4,5

¹⁹. Revelation 3:10

²⁰. Proverbs 2:16-19

surely become victims of the evil trinity and their cohorts. These are waiting at the exit to bait unsuspecting souls just as Cain of old was ensnared.²¹ The evil trinity, Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet, with their cohorts are out there, waiting to pounce and devour the souls of the gullible rebels and unsuspecting wanderers. This danger of being defiled is not just moral in nature but also spiritual; it involves the diabolical realm. The apostle considers the institutional church as a dead congregation²² comprising of those who “*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*”;²³ the Vatican, which the holy Scriptures designates as “*the Mother of harlots*”,²⁴ is the paragon of the institutional religion.

There is no greater judgment than to be cut off from the church of the living God. Sometimes when we despise Christian fellowship and violate the doctrine of biblical separation, God will purge us out of the godly ambience. “*Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve Me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within My house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in My sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD.*”²⁵ When we suffer the loss of Christian fellow-

²¹. Genesis 4:7b

²². Proverbs 21:16

²³. II Timothy 3:5a

²⁴. Revelation 17:5

²⁵. Psalm 101:6-8

ship, we will be deprived of the golden pipes that convey the golden olive oil of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

We experience the blessedness of the society of God's people only when the grace of Christ works effectually in our hearts. The psalmist affirms, *"For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."*²⁷ Without this grace, we can never experimentally testify like the psalmist; he further proclaims, *"Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee."*²⁸ Only with effectual grace can we find real affinity with the psalmist, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."*²⁹

There are some who may enquire about those who are sent out on a spiritual mission or a godly errand alone. My answer is that these have the blessing of the church, besides, their motives and conduct are under the scrutiny of the omniscient God. For that matter the Scriptures does recommend us to go at least in bands of two.³⁰ God's people, even when they are constrained to be scattered, have this longing to return back home. Did not Jacob pine to return to the place of his godly parents? Even Naomi finally came home to Bethlehem (for in the

²⁶. Zechariah 4:12

²⁷. Psalm 84:10

²⁸. Psalm 84:4

²⁹. Psalm 122:1,2

³⁰. Luke 10:1

house of bread we shall be nourished). After all his itineraries, Paul and his retinue were wont to return either to Antioch of Syria or Jerusalem to rest and roost. Joseph, though elevated to so great an office in Egypt, missed sorely his father and brethren back at home. As the psalmist declares: *“How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”*³¹ Home for God’s people is where the sweet presence of Christ is, where the aroma of His love is felt! It is in the tabernacles of God that the comfort and solace of the Holy Spirit is felt! Experimentally it is like being refreshed by *“the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”*³² Wherefore those that know of such blessedness are able to experimentally affirm, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*³³

Our safety and strength in the midst of the twin battles (Armageddon and Gog and Magog) of the final apostasy is to rally and dwell together with God’s elect! ❧

³¹. Psalm 84:1,2

³². Psalm 133:3b

³³. Psalm 133:1

