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# Mission with Passion: An Exegesis of Acts 20.22-24 in the Context of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Missionaries, Borno State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The research explores the passionate mission work of Apostle Paul as depicted in Acts 20.22-24, analysing its relevance to the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) missionaries in Borno State, Nigeria. Paul's significant contributions to the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem and his relentless pursuit of evangelism, despite suffering and persecution, highlight his unwavering dedication to the gospel. His missionary journeys were characterized by a deep commitment to reaching Gentiles and establishing churches, even while facing hardships, dangers, and imprisonment. In Borno State, the RCCG missionaries exemplify a similar passion for their mission, undeterred by threats from the insurgent group Boko Haram. Findings indicate that these missionaries embrace the challenges of their work, reflecting Paul's resolve in the face of adversity. Their willingness to endure significant risks and hardships reveals a profound dedication to their calling, resonating with Paul's example. This study ultimately underscores the enduring nature of missionary passion, illustrating that true commitment to Christ's mission transcends personal comfort and safety, reflecting the deep-rooted conviction seen in both Paul and RCCG missionaries. Therefore, it is recommended that missionaries sent by the church to any mission field should be sure of their calling and be passionate about the work to enable them to endure any suffering they may encounter on the mission field.

**Keywords:** Passion; mission; Apostle Paul; Book of Acts; Redeemed Christian Church of God; Nigeria

## Introduction

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a Pentecostal megachurch founded in Nigeria in 1952, known for its vigorous evangelism and extensive global missionary

network. Its theology emphasises holiness, the practicality of faith, and a mandate to spread the gospel, making it a salient case study for missionary passion. This study focuses on its missionaries in Borno State, Northern Nigeria, a region predominantly consisting of Kanuri Muslims. This region has been the epicentre of the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency since 2009, a conflict that has resulted in the death of tens of thousands and the displacement of millions. Christian communities and missionaries have been specific targets of violence, making mission work in this area exceptionally perilous. This context of persistent threat provides a powerful modern analogue to the “imprisonments and hardships” Paul anticipated (Acts 20.23).

The Apostle Paul’s missionary endeavours contributed immensely to the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the Gentile world. Bruce rightly observes that “the spread of Christianity cannot be imagined apart from Paul’s work” (Bruce 1990). In the book of Acts, three missionary journeys of Paul are recorded, and each of these journeys was undertaken with passion, attracting him to various forms of persecution and suffering. He even suffered several traumatic experiences, including personal dangers and imprisonments, some of which are not recorded in the book of Acts. No doubt, his passion for the gospel of Christ made him encounter so much trouble that he regards suffering as an essential and regular characteristic of apostolic service, not just an occasional experience of his apostleship, as Furnish observes (Furnish 1984: 283). He could look at his life and say, “I die every day!” (1 Cor. 15.31; Hafemann, 1993: 919). More importantly, Paul’s writings depict his positive attitude toward missionary sufferings because he sees them as evidence of his contributions to the gospel and an integral part of his ministry, for his calling is inextricably linked to suffering (Acts 9.15-16). This research, therefore, examines Paul’s passion for his mission work as showcased in Acts 20.22-24 in the context of the Redeemed Christian Church of God missionaries, Borno State, Nigeria.

## Methodology

The study employed a contextual approach to examine how Apostle Paul’s passion for his mission was understood and appropriated by missionaries in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The historical-critical exegetical method was utilized to interpret the selected biblical passage, alongside a descriptive research design aimed at explaining Paul’s passion for mission and its application within the Redeemed Christian Church of God. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select RCCG missionaries from Borno Province. Ten missionaries (8 male, 2 female) were selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was guided by a protocol of ten core questions designed to explore their understanding of mission, their personal calling, their experiences of suffering, and their theological sources of resilience (e.g., “How do you understand

the purpose of your mission here?"; "Can you describe a time when you felt your life was in danger?" "What biblical figures or passages sustain you?"). The interviews were conducted in English.

The gathered data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved transcribing the interviews, coding the data, and identifying predominant themes that captured the participants' experiences and perspectives on passion and suffering in mission. Participants were provided with adequate information about the study, ensuring a clear understanding of its purpose and objectives. Besides, the participants' names are real, and their participation was entirely voluntary, without coercion or undue pressure. Consent was sought through the head of the RCCG Mission Board to interview these RCCG missionaries.

## The Concept of Mission

The definition of "mission" has been a subject of scholarly debate, often centring on its scope. Douglas presents a broad definition, arguing that mission "is concerned with every assignment the church is sent to do", thus encompassing a wide range of activities beyond evangelism (Douglas 1975: 22–24). This expansive view is narrowed by scholars like Kostenberger, who defines mission more specifically as "a conscious, intentional, organised and extensive effort to convert others to one's religion by way of evangelisation" (Kostenberger 2000: 665–67). Moreau offers a mediating perspective, arguing that while the purpose can be broad or narrow, the key is the intentional dispatch to complete an assignment, which can include evangelism, social justice, and transformation (Moreau 2000: 636–38). This study aligns with Moreau's integrative view, as the passion driving Paul and the RCCG missionaries is not limited to verbal proclamation but extends to enduring suffering as an integral part of completing their God-given assignment.

However, this expansive view must be critiqued through cultural encounter. Sanneh (1989: 1–5) argues that translating the gospel empowers local cultures, decolonizing faith and transforming mission from a one-way dissemination into a dynamic, two-way process, challenging simplistic readings of mission as mere "expansion". Further critiquing the Western missionary model, Dube's postcolonial feminist interpretation urges a reading of missionary texts that is conscious of imperialist and patriarchal underpinnings (Dube 2000). She asks whose voices are centred and whose are marginalized in traditional mission narratives. While Paul's passion is central to this study, Dube's framework reminds us to be mindful of the often-unheard voices of the communities being evangelized, a crucial consideration for the RCCG's work in Northern Nigeria. Okure (1988), focusing on the Johannine model, emphasizes mission as a transformative encounter rooted in dialogue and service, as exemplified by Jesus with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4.1–42). This model

complements the Pauline focus on passion with a necessary emphasis on receptive engagement with the “other”.

## The Concept of Passion

The word “passion” comes from the Latin word *passio* meaning “suffering”; passionate people are prone to suffering because their passion seems to dictate and dominate them; hence, they are enslaved by their passion (Vallerand and Houliort, 2019: 5). Passion can be described as the vehicle that drives the wheel of any great success and achievement in life. This is evident in the life of the Apostle Paul, who once said, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel ...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9.16, 22). Paul’s achievements in his missionary enterprise were a result of his passion to spread the gospel of Christ to any length, even to places where the name of Christ had not been mentioned. His passion undoubtedly made him unstoppable and unrelentless in seeing that he covered some places in all three missionary journeys. A modern definition of passion that is universal, as put forward by Vallerand, is to have “a strong liking for an activity, object, or concept”. He argued further that passion could go beyond a mere love for something but “a high valuation of the activity and important commitment toward it” (Vallerand 2015: 7).

Solomon (1993) identifies three classes of passion, which include emotions, moods, and desires, noting that all share a power to give circumstances significance. He argues that religious passion is more an attitude than an emotion (Solomon 1993: 70–71). The passion of Paul was, therefore, not just an emotion that could fade away easily, but an attitude, for he was determined to see the world in his time saved by accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. So, he gave all of his life to his mission and was ready to spend and be spent for the gospel expansion.

## The Mission of the Apostle Paul

Paul went out on three notable missionary journeys (Acts 13.2–14.28; 15.40–18.23), planting new churches and strengthening the existing ones. According to Chom, Paul was not only planting churches but also advancing the kingdom of God by taking the kingdom messages to places where it was not known (Chom 2015: 168). Supporting this view, Ugo opines that, in each of Paul’s missionary journeys, he travelled through the Mediterranean world preaching the gospel and establishing new churches. Hence, Paul saw every city as a natural place to preach the Gospel and spread it to the surrounding areas. Therefore, Apostle Paul passionately embarked on all three missionary journeys to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was ready to do anything for the sake of the gospel. And of course, this mission exposed him to many dangers, sufferings, and afflictions as he highlighted in 2 Cor. 11.23–33, though

he was not discouraged by any of them because of his passion for the work (Ugo 2012: 1–15).

Waltman notes that Paul planned and organized his mission to spread the gospel. He possessed the attributes, knowledge, and skills to be the most capable person of bringing the message of salvation to the Gentiles because of his awareness of Greco-Roman culture, customs, education, commerce, and laws (Waltman 2010: x-xv). Supporting this view, Allen observes that while Paul's first journey was strategic, his second was notably directed by the Spirit's prohibitions (e.g., being forbidden to preach in Asia and Bithynia), leading him to Macedonia. His third journey, however, returned to a more planned approach (Allen 2016: 1-5, 18–20).

## Backgrounds to Paul's Passion for Mission

Paul lived in two worlds – the Greco-Roman and the Jewish – and was influenced by them. His writings show a tremendous knowledge of these two worlds, as well as his conversion experience. Paul was known to be a Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, which he handled passionately with a boast. Beyond the Jewish culture and faith, Paul entered into different cultural environments and interfaith relationships to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. He organizes various intercultural outreaches to win as many Gentiles as possible for the Lord Jesus Christ (Young 1997). Young further asserts that "Paul's mission to the Gentiles is deeply rooted in his Jewish way of thinking". No wonder he said in 1 Corinthians 9.19-23, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

Paul understood clearly the mandate given to him by Jesus Christ to be his mouthpiece to the Gentiles about the gospel message. Hence, he took the assignment with passion. No wonder the prologue of his letters includes this conviction with the phrase "called to be an apostle" or "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (cf. Rom. 1.1; 1 Cor. 1.1; Gal. 1.1; Eph. 1.1; etc.). It can, therefore, be concluded that his conviction about his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles motivated his passion for the work. As a rabbi who studied the Torah and the oral tradition of the Pharisees, he was unmatched among his contemporaries in his fervent adherence to the Jewish religious heritage that he dedicated his life to eliminating a newly formed fringe faction of Judaism: the disciples of Jesus. Paul's passion for Moses, his abhorrence of Gentiles' impact on the Jewish faith, and his resentment of Jesus drove him to the brink of acting violently against the church. He describes his zeal for the Jewish faith and disregard for the church, particularly in Gal. 1.13-14, Phil. 3.4-6 and 1 Tim. 1.13. However, when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, he exchanged the law of Moses for faith in Christ, and hatred of non-Jews for love of the church (Pate 2013).

Referring to his past in Philippians 3.6, he speaks of his love and dedication to the Law of Moses, “as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless” (RSV); therefore, it was believed that his persecution of the church was an essential part of his zeal for the Jewish laws and customs. His statements in Galatians 1.13-14 give the impression that he is a zealot for fathers’ customs (Setzer 1994: 10–11). Perhaps, as Setzer observes, “the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah,” among other things, must have infuriated Paul and flamed his fire of persecution against the early disciples (Setzer 1994: 10-11; Porter 2008: 42).

The wellspring of Paul’s pre-conversion zeal is a critical point of analysis. Sanders (2015) challenges a common assumption, arguing that Paul’s persecution of the church was “not dictated by his Pharisaic status”, but was rather an act of “extraordinary passion” that was unusual even among Pharisees (Sanders, 2015: 78). This view helpfully distinguishes Pharisaic orthodoxy from violent zealotry. It is further illuminated by Setzer, who suggests that the specific theological claim of Jesus as Messiah was likely a primary catalyst that “infuriated Paul and flamed his fire of persecution” (Setzer 1994: 10-11). Thus, Sanders’ “extraordinary passion” may have been ignited by the specific theological threat posed by the early Christians, as Setzer proposes. This pre-conversion pattern is crucial, as it establishes that Paul’s character was inherently passionate; his conversion did not create a new passion but re-channelled its object from the Law of Moses to the Gospel of Christ (Segal 1990: 125).

The same passion he has for the Law in Judaism was carried over to Christianity. As he was passionate about defending the Law and the traditions of the fathers, so also, he was to defend the gospel of Christ and cause many to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. As Segal rightly notes, “Paul does not forget his Jewish past; rather, he inverts the values of his past in a way that is consonant with his new commitments” (Segal 1990: 125). His goal was to win mankind over to Christ at whatever cost. He became all things to all men so that he could win some people for Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 9.19-22). More so, Apostle Paul, out of passion for Christ, was ready to preach the gospel where the name of Christ was not yet mentioned so that he would not appear to be building on another man’s foundation (cf. Rom. 15.20; Barrett 2003: 56). Bird asserted that “Paul defines his ministry and identity as that of a bond-slave of Jesus Christ with a resolute commitment to the call and cause of the gospel. To venerate Paul is to denigrate the Saviour whom he so passionately serves” (Bird 2014). Sanders refers to Paul as “the passionate man who was obsessed with his cause” (Sanders 2015: xix).

## Exegesis of Acts 20.22-24

Paul’s passion to see his mission of preaching the Gospel of Christ fulfilled was very exceptional to the extent that he was not ashamed to suffer and even die for it. He

desired to see Christ being magnified in his body always (Phil. 1.20). In his farewell address in Acts 20.17-24, he reminds the Ephesian elders about his integrity all the time he had been with them and his sufferings from the Jewish opponents (Acts 20.17b-19). Then, he claims to face the future ministry in Jerusalem, which is going to be with great trials, imprisonments, and hardships as the Spirit of God told him, while every attempt of the brethren to discourage him proved abortive because of his passion (Venkataraman, 2016: 222-23). The apostle's willingness or passion to suffer for the cause of the Gospel was clearly stated by him:

Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ, (*kai nun idou*) "and now, behold," is a Septuagint expression (cf. 13.11) which points to an uncertain present that Paul was anticipating in his speech (Conzelmann 1972: 174). The Greek words δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι (*dedemenos egō tō pneumati*) "bound in the Spirit," may imply that Paul felt constrained in his mind or that he was in captivity to the Holy Spirit to follow God's leading (Guy 1979: 123). The phrase δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι ("bound in the spirit") is a pivotal and debated phrase that encapsulates Paul's drive. Conzelmann argues for a sense of supernatural constraint, stating Paul was "under the constraint of the Spirit to travel to Jerusalem" (Conzelmann 1972: 174), a view supported by Bromiley's (1985: 148) etymological analysis of the root verb *deō* (to bind, imprison). However, Lovett presents a dissenting grammatical argument, contending that the absence of the adjective "Holy" (Ἅγιος) differentiates the "spirit" in v. 22 from the "Holy Spirit" (Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον) explicitly mentioned in v. 23 (Lovett 1972: 334). While Lovett's grammatical observation is valid, the immediate context of divine guidance and the strong, binding force of the verb *deō* make Conzelmann's interpretation more compelling. The concept of being "bound by the Spirit" fits the overarching narrative of Acts, where the Spirit directs missionary movement (e.g., Acts 16.6-7), and powerfully describes the internal compulsion that both Paul and the RCCG missionaries describe.

πορεύομαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ (*poreuomai eis Ierusalēm*) "going to Jerusalem." There is a reference to this journey in Romans 15.25, Acts 19.21, and 1 Cor. 16.4 (Bruce 1990: 432). It has already been established that Paul was under the constraint of the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, but it was a journey of uncertainty, for he did not know yet what would happen to him there. Apart from being constrained by the Spirit of God to undertake the journey, even after he was warned later by the brethren through the same Spirit (Acts 21.4, 10-14), he refused to listen to them because he was being consumed by his passion to get his mission of preaching the gospel accomplished, as he rightly said in verse 24. Hence, it is a journey of necessity and uncertainty because Paul was constrained by the Spirit to undertake it (Marshall 2014: 371). Venkataraman asserts that it would be a journey of no return for Paul (Venkataraman 2016: 222-23). However, as Horton rightly observes, "the witness of the Spirit was not intended to stop Paul from going" (Horton 1981: 238). Dunn draws an analogy between Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as noted in the Gospels and Paul's journey to Jerusalem,

in which, in both cases, Jerusalem stands as their place of destiny where they would experience rejection and great suffering and thus fulfil the purpose of God for their lives. He also notes that in both cases, Jesus and Paul expressed a sense of divine compulsion on them to head towards Jerusalem, and they both pointed out a prophetic anticipation of suffering (Dunn 1996: 265).

μη εἰδώς (*mē eidōs*) “not knowing.” Though Paul does not know what will happen to him in Jerusalem, he can understand by the Spirit that whatever city he visits, he will face imprisonment and tribulations (vs. 23; Marshall 1981: 331). In support of this opinion, Barrett asserts that Paul professes ignorance of what exactly would happen to him in Jerusalem; he has only limited information from the Spirit (Barrett 2002: 314). The phrase τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον κατὰ πόλιν διαμαρτύρεται μοι – “the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city” could imply the Spirit speaking to Paul through prophets and disciples in various churches, as in the case of disciples in Acts 21.4 and prophet Agabus in Acts 21.10-13 (Bruce 1990: 432). In this regard, Dunn observes that “the mission of Paul, which began with such clear signs of the Spirit’s direction (Acts 13.2; 16.6-7) ends on a similar note of conviction” (Dunn 1996: 272). On this note, Conzelmann rightly asserts that both the life of Paul and his willingness to suffer for the gospel were guided by God (Conzelmann 1972: 174). δεσμὰ καὶ θλίψεις με μένουσιν – “bonds and afflictions are awaiting me” could mean that he could not escape sufferings in the course of spreading the gospel. Going by the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21.11, it is stated clearly that the Jews at Jerusalem would persecute Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles. This alludes to his loss of freedom but has nothing to say about his death because God assures him later in Acts 23.11 that he would not die in Jerusalem (Witherington III 1998: 618).

The word δεσμὰ (*desma*) means “to bind, to fasten with chains, or to throw into chains” (Thayer 2007: 131). While θλίψεις (*thlipseis*) as used in LXX means “distress, trouble, oppression, tribulation,” etc. It is used figuratively in the New Testament to denote unavoidable afflictions that believers and apostles undergo for Christ’s sake (Bromiley, 1985: 334). With these facts, it is observed that Paul would unavoidably suffer some afflictions and tribulations in Jerusalem, but it is not going to lead to his death as God assures him in Acts 23.11, even though he was ready to be bound and also die for the name of Jesus at Jerusalem (Acts 21.13). One thing is certain here: when one is consumed by one’s passion, nothing can discourage him/her.

In verse 24, Paul says; ἀλλ’ οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιούμαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἑμαυτῷ, “of no account do I make my life valuable to myself” (Douglas, 1975: 495). Bruce translates it to mean “I reckon my life of no account, as (though it were) precious to myself” (Bruce 1990: 432). Barrett notes that life has no worth to Paul than the fulfilment of his calling (Barrett 2002: 314). This statement implies that Paul is passionate about his mission to the Gentiles and thus willing to suffer for the gospel, even to die for Christ, for many of his letters attest to this fact (cf. 2 Cor. 4.7-12; 6.4-10; Phil. 1.20-21;

2.17; Col. 1.24) (Polhill 1992: 425). Therefore, what matters most to Paul was “to finish the course and the ministry which he had received from the Lord Jesus” (τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον μου καὶ τὴν διακονίαν ἣν ἔλαβον παρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ). The phrase “to finish the course”, τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον, is an allusion to the athletic metaphor that Paul often uses in his letters to denote his preaching ministry, which the Lord Jesus gave him (cf. 1 Cor. 9.24; Phil. 3.14 (Witherington III 1998: 620-22). And the ministry (διακονίαν) here denotes his “testimony to the gospel of God’s grace (Polhill 1992: 425), for the grace of God through Christ is the central focus of the gospel (cf. v. 32) as Bruce rightly observes (Bruce 1990: 432).

Paul’s heartbeat, therefore, was to accomplish the ministry given to him by the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles. Nothing was more important to him than that, not even his own life. Venkataraman observes that “the ultimate value of Paul’s life was necessarily bound up with his ultimate purpose in life,” and that purpose was to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace (Venkataraman 2016: 222-3). This, of course, denotes the demonstration of his deeper love for Christ and the unequalled value of eternal life with Christ in the coming world. This also made him refuse to claim his right to financial support from churches he planted (1 Cor. 9.15-23; Hafemann, 2015: 139-41). Interestingly, Jervis observes that “affliction is a companion of the gospel in Paul’s time and so accompanies those who preach and live the gospel”; hence, this might have influenced his conviction to endure any suffering for the gospel to fulfil his ministry (Jervis 2007: 26).

Indeed, the central claim of the entire argument is that Paul referred to himself as a prisoner of Christ rather than a prisoner of Emperor Nero when he was later imprisoned and listed on the death row of Emperor Nero in Rome. Seeing the circumstance as a necessary aspect of suffering for the sake of God’s Kingdom, he was unconcerned. In the face of such difficulty, he never tried or thought of denying Christ or turning away from the gospel to gain his freedom; instead, he decided to die for the sake of Christ’s gospel (Swindoll 2014: 176). Kuhatschek notes that because Paul understands that the cross and the gospel are inseparable, and for people to hear the gospel and be saved, he was willing to suffer hardship, imprisonment, stoning, and even death so that the gospel might reach the lost world (Kuhatschek 2010: 57). Passion made him take the risk. What a passion for the mission of Christ!

## **Paul’s Passion and the Contemporary Missionary Context**

The exegesis of Acts 20:22-24 reveals a multifaceted paradigm of Pauline passion. This is not merely a historical account but provides a theological framework comprising several key characteristics:

1. A sense of being divinely compelled or constrained (δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι) to pursue the mission, even against external advice.
2. A conscious acceptance of unknown and impending suffering (μὴ εἰδώς τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ συναντήσοντά μοι) as an inherent part of the calling.
3. A radical devaluation of personal safety and life (οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιούμεαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἑμαυτῷ) when weighed against the imperative of the mission.
4. A singular, unwavering focus on completing the specific ministry received from Christ (τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον μου καὶ τὴν διακονίαν).

This framework offers more than a simple analogy; it provides a hermeneutical lens through which to analyse contemporary missionary experiences. The succeeding segment examines the qualitative data from RCCG missionaries in Borno State not merely as a catalogue of hardships, but through the specific structure of this Pauline paradigm. The question is not simply if they suffer, but how their experiences (their sense of calling, their response to threat, and their understanding of sacrifice) resonate with the architectural elements of passion defined by Paul. This moves the analysis from thematic similarity to structured theological comparison, demonstrating the enduring and translatable nature of this missionary passion across centuries and cultures.

## RCCG Missionaries and their Passion

A passion for the mission is not a common attribute among many ministers of the gospel in contemporary society, as it may involve unpleasant experiences, as seen in the case of the Apostle Paul. However, he did not allow these experiences to deter him from fulfilling his ministry. In contrast, in this world of “wealth and health” gospel, many gospel ministers are unwilling to sacrifice their comfort and pleasure to endure the stress and hardship associated with missionary work.

Findings in this study from the Redeemed Christian Church of God’s missionaries in Borno State, Northern Nigeria, revealed that no one could do missionary work without experiencing suffering. The question is: “Who can endure the suffering associated with missionary work?” This work answers this question using the lives of RCCG missionaries. It is understood that the encounter Paul had with Jesus Christ produced in him a spiritual, intellectual, and ethical revolution to forsake all comforts and pleasures of life to pursue Christ and spread his gospel relentlessly in the Mediterranean world despite all the persecutions, oppositions, and sufferings he encountered.

Besides, it is discovered that Paul was ready to face bonds and afflictions awaiting him in every city where he would visit to preach the gospel, as warned by the Holy Spirit, because of his strong determination to fulfil the ministry Christ had given him.

How many ministers of the gospel today would hear that bond and affliction are awaiting them in a place, city, or region and would still be willing to forge ahead to preach the gospel there? However, RCCG missionaries in Borno State under study proved to be exceptional in this regard. They demonstrated passion for the gospel of Christ despite their understanding that they were working in dangerous zones. Interview respondents (Austin Igwara, Ibrahim Dauda, Sadi Wabba) described daily threats from Boko Haram, including nearby chants of 'Allahu Akbar', rocket shootings, and fleeing for their lives into the jungle for days at a time. According to them, the insurgency has resulted in the death of many of them in the past, yet they persisted in forging ahead, remaining in those mission fields to preach the gospel of Christ, because they were passionate about the mission of Christ entrusted to their hands.

Much like Paul, these missionaries were unfazed by the dangers and did not consider their lives as precious. Borno State in Northern Nigeria has been a perilous region for missionaries in recent years due to the Boko Haram insurgency, which has claimed many lives and destroyed property, especially targeting Christian missionaries. The missionaries there could not sleep peacefully because of the constant attacks by Boko Haram militants. The insurgency also disrupted church services in those mission fields. Ohre Mark (interview respondent) shared his experience of spending days in the forest with others fleeing Boko Haram. He had already told his church members that whenever they saw him as their pastor, that was when the church service would be held, whether mid-week or on Sunday. In other words, there is no fixed schedule for church services.

These missionaries are working passionately, endangering their lives daily, but not for material or financial gains, because they experience hunger and thirst.<sup>1</sup> Femi Alaba (interview respondent) attested to hiding in the bush for days without food, surviving on raw groundnuts, with water being a rare find. This experience of hunger is related to Apostle Paul's experience. Therefore, RCCG missionaries have taken mission work as a do-or-die affair. Umoren (2017) characterizes Nigerian Christianity as a "theology of endurance", forged through political and religious strife. Thus, the missionaries' passion is a fusion of Pauline dedication and this distinctively Nigerian fortitude.

This suggests that these RCCG missionaries in Borno State were passionate about their calling, and their conviction was very strong, enabling them to withstand suffering. Their approach, while passionate, can be reflexively examined through

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1 The ethical complexity of mission in conflict zones, including the potential risk to local communities, is acknowledged here. The missionaries interviewed stated that their strategy is strictly non-coercive and focused on service and presence, often at the explicit invitation of vulnerable local communities. Nevertheless, this remains a paramount consideration for missiology in such contexts.

the lens of Dube (2000) and Sanneh (1989). Their testimony shows a passion for Christ and a commitment to their community that aligns with Okure's (1988) model of service. However, the complex postcolonial context of Northern Nigeria demands a continued critical awareness of the power dynamics inherent in any missionary activity, even that undertaken by a global South church. The RCCG's mission, therefore, exists at the intersection of Pauline passion, a Nigerian theology of endurance, and the ongoing global conversation about decolonized and contextual missiology.

The sufferings Paul endured in his missionary activities were all motivated by his love for Christ, for he said, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8.35). As RCCG missionaries respond in line with Paul's perspective here, they see suffering as part of the mission; hence, it should be embraced with the love of God in every circumstance. The endurance of RCCG missionaries is, therefore, highly commendable, akin to Paul's. Despite all that they face in the mission fields, they refuse to be discouraged. It is evident that they are amidst dangers, yet they do not relent in their missionary activities, maintaining a singular focus that the Gospel of Christ must be preached, thereby saving souls for God's Kingdom. This is fuelled by their passion for the mission of Christ.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the Pauline model of passion, which was defined by divine constraint, the acceptance of suffering, the devaluation of personal safety, and a focus on completing one's course, provides a strong theological framework for understanding contemporary missionary resilience. The experiences of RCCG missionaries in Borno State are not just random acts of bravery but are revealed, through this framework, as a direct continuation of the missionary passion exemplified in Acts.

The central finding is that the suffering experienced by Apostle Paul is not merely analogous to, but structurally consistent with, the realities faced by missionaries in conflict zones today. While the first-century context involved Jewish opposition and Roman imprisonment and the twenty-first-century context involves terrorist insurgency, the underlying architecture of passion that enables endurance remains unchanged. This insight significantly contributes to missiology by providing a biblical hermeneutic for interpreting and validating the experiences of modern missionaries.

Therefore, based on this study, it is recommended that:

1. Missionary training programmes within the church should incorporate the exegesis of passages like Acts 20.22-24 to theologically prepare candidates for the realities of suffering, framing it not as a failure of strategy but as a potential marker of authentic, passionate calling.

2. Sending churches and mission boards must do everything in their power to provide robust logistical, financial and psychological support to missionaries in the field. This practical encouragement is essential to sustain the passion identified in this study and prevent discouragement.
3. Future research should explore this Pauline paradigm in other denominational and geographical contexts to test its broader applicability and to develop further a theology of missionary suffering and passion.

## About the Author

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