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adheres to the orthodox faith

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE BELIEVE

DR. K. P. YOHANNAN METROPOLITAN

FAITH AND TRADITION SERIES

Guiding Principles
(English)
Faith And Tradition Series
by Dr. K.P. Yohannan Metropolitan

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Believers Eastern Church

Formerly known as “Believers Church.” After a year of discussion and research, during the week of November 28 - December 5, 2016, a proposal was presented to the Episcopal Synod to change the Church name from ‘Believers Church’ to ‘Believers Eastern Church.’ It was unanimously approved. This change was made so as to represent adherence to the ‘ancient - future’ nature of the Church. ‘Believers Eastern Church’ adheres to the orthodox historical faith of the holy church.



Mission Statement of Believers Eastern Church

The mission of our church is to glorify God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—by following in the footsteps of the ancient orthodox faith and practice of the holy church, to worship God as He desires, to grow together in love and unity, to instruct and equip the people of God for the work of the ministry and to fulfill the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus by all means through word and deed.

Acknowledgement

This book found its beginning in series of lectures I did at the St. Thomas Believers Eastern Church Cathedral in Tiruvalla in the year 2004.

I am grateful for many faithful and loyal leaders and members of our Church that have helped to see this updated volume release at this time. I especially thank Jeena Kochamma and Fr. Dr. Daniel Johnson who gave leadership to this project. At the same time I thank God for the tens of thousands of faithful members of our Church worldwide that have lived out these principles with godliness. Barekmor.

Dedication

To all the grandmothers and grandfathers, the strong and the weak, the educated and the illiterate, the fathers and the mothers, the young people and little children, the urban dwellers and Adivasis and Dalits, the mature believers and the new believers, the overcomers and those struggling, the poor and the rich—all members of Believers Eastern Church scattered throughout many nations and representing more than 300 languages. I am deeply grateful for the privilege to be called by the Lord to shepherd you and to be your spiritual father. This book is dedicated to you.

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Preface

My journey of the past 15 years, learning His ways to lead one of the fastest growing church movements in history, has driven me to my knees to learn the meaning of knowing God intimately and as the fathers of faith would say “theosis” or “being partakers of His nature” became an insatiable thirst of my heart.

Two problems I had to deal with; one the struggle we face in the way of opposition from our pre-Christian world that we live in and secondly the slow death of the spiritual life of the church at large in the sub-continent, by the import of the post-Christian, liberal worldliness of the Western Church via popular media outlets. The teaching of prosperity gospel is only one such example.

I desperately wanted to make sure that our churches would be rooted in historical, authentic Christian values, based on the Word of God and the holy traditions that was handed down to us by the apostles and the fathers of faith.

My dilemma, as the Metropolitan of the Believers Eastern Church with some 3 million people was, how I must lead His people in this complex convergence culture, so that we can remain part of the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.’ Today there are over 40000

denominations all claiming to be the true church, but most don't care about governance, Word and sacraments of the holy church.

These crises led me to travel back in time to the ancient church (especially of the 1st three centuries), their faith and practice before it was changed by the reformation. The timelessness of the church based on the Word of God, holy sacraments and true worship has helped us to lead our church with authenticity and embrace the 'sacramental' life that the fathers of the church taught.

Someone recently commented that, most of the modern gatherings under the name 'church' are at best, just social gatherings for Bible study and entertainment by musicians and teachers.

But in God's church, God is the audience. His people gather to meet Him and worship Him. God cares about me as just one person, but His heart is for His people - the body of Christ; not just one but the holy church as a whole, His people and I am part of that holy church.

This is the reason we say 'Believers Eastern Church' adheres to the orthodox faith.

But what does it mean when it comes to practical implications? How may we live in this dark time in history without compromising or becoming like the world?

As we sought to answer these questions, one of the important things God led us to do was to come up with some non-negotiables; timeless principles that will help us to hold our inner life pure and regard our work as worship. This book is the result of the process we embarked on.

My prayer is that, the church at large will be helped and benefited from the truths we share in this volume.

Believers Eastern Church surely doesn't claim that we are the perfect church or that we have all the answers. But one thing we are confident about - the Lord of the church, led by His apostles and the fathers of the church, gave us the pure doctrines and holy traditions that kept the church from being destroyed by the enemy. And that if we follow them, we can be part of a vibrant church, with one foot in the ancient and the other in the future - or as Robert Webber would call it 'the ancient-future church.'

We must believe what Jesus promised, 'I will build my church.'¹ Let us be part of His church as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

¹St. Matthew 16:18.

Introduction

Around the world today, more than 3 million people identify themselves as *Believers Eastern Church* Christians. Our church represents hundreds of languages and dozens of diverse cultures, but we are held together by a common conviction: that we are part of the holy church that has its beginning in the Book of Acts. Our faith, worship and practices are based on the teachings of the apostles and fathers of the faith and on the holy traditions of the ancient church.

Men and women throughout history have experienced incredibly different circumstances and ways of life. Yet each one has shared a core identity; that they are human, created in the image of God. In the same way, the holy church has remained the same in essence and purpose since it began 2000 years ago. Each generation of the holy church has embraced the core, non-negotiable aspects of the faith and holy traditions handed down by the apostles and early church fathers. It is good for us to remember that for the first 1000 years of church history, the church was not divided into denominations. There was only one church, which was orthodox in faith and practice. It was only later that the church was divided into the Western Church and the Eastern Church.

Believers Eastern Church follows in the footsteps of the ancient orthodox church in its faith, worship and traditions. We do not claim to know everything or to be perfect. We don't claim to have all the answers. But we do believe we are called by God to be His representatives on earth, just as any other church that follows in the footsteps of the apostles and fathers of faith. While we have one foot in the ancient history of the holy church, holding on to the orthodox faith and practices, we also have one foot in the present. The church is a living organism, active in our world. It is the Body of Christ, who is "the same yesterday, today and forever."¹

To sum it up in a few words, Believers Eastern Church is an "ancient-future church". This book explains our major spiritual emphases as we seek to live out the orthodox faith in the present history we are part of. It is written for all the members of our church to learn the important principles that made us who we are and how to guard the values that shape our future. Together, let us press on to know the Lord and Master of the church more intimately and worship Him in spirit and truth. And may our church be used by God to bring the love of Christ to a desperately needy and hurting world.

¹Hebrews 13:8.

1

PORTRAIT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

*“and on this rock I will build My church,
and the gates of Hades
shall not prevail against it.”*

ST. MATTHEW 16:18

*“. . . praising God and having favor with all the people.
And the Lord added to the church daily
those who were being saved.”*

ACTS 2:47

History has a record of the many false doctrines and compromises that have brought divisions to the church. Yet, the true orthodox faith was never lost. All through the centuries, there have always been people who held on to the teaching of the apostles and fathers of the faith. But how do we know what the ‘true church’ looks like today, 2000 years after it was born?

Let me answer that question with an illustration. It is like tracing your family line through a DNA structure. Even though you were born several years down the line from the time of your grandfather or great-grandfather, you are part of the same family line and share common genetic traits. In the same way, churches or denominations may have different starting points, but as long as they are a link in the chain of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” they are part of the original orthodox church that began in the Book of Acts.

What does the DNA of the authentic church look like? The early history of the church narrates the turbulent times it had to go through. It had to weather the attacks on it from within and without. From time to time, false teachers tried to lead the church astray from the apostles’ teachings and traditions. When we read Revelation 2 and 3, we already know how false doctrines and practices had crept into the church. But the Holy Spirit always worked through godly leaders apostles, church fathers, bishops

and abbots of Monastic movements to keep the purity of the holy church.

The people of God in the first century were taught to “hold fast to not only the doctrine, but also the holy tradition handed to them.”¹ St. Paul taught that even if an angel were to come and proclaim any other gospel or truth other than what the apostles taught, he should be cursed.² By the middle of the first century, there arose a dispute in Antioch about whether the gentile believers needed to adhere to Old Testament laws. The matter was brought before the apostles in Jerusalem, and they discussed it in detail. It was the brother of the Lord, St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who gave the solution, and this settled the matter. This is known as the Council of Jerusalem.³

In the next few hundred years, there arose other false teachings and controversies. The Gnostics claimed their cult had special revelation and knowledge that was superior to the apostles’ teachings. Proponents of Montanism practised prophetic programs, while the cult of Sabellianism indulged in false teachings regarding the Holy Trinity.

Further on, the 4th century witnessed one of the most dangerous cult teachings gaining momentum. It was taught by a man named Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria in Egypt. He denied the eternity of the Son of God, claiming that Jesus Christ was not God but only a created being. This was dealt with at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, where over 300 bishops gathered along with priests and deacons, making a total of nearly 2000 people

¹II Thessalonians 2:15; I Corinthians 11 ²Galatians 1:8; II Thessalonians 3:6 ³Acts 15.

from all over the Christian world. The teachings of Arius were rejected and the Nicene Creed was the result of it.

Between AD 325 and 787, seven such church-wide councils were held, all dealing with the fundamental teaching of the apostles and holding on to the purity of the faith and holy traditions. These ecumenical councils were held in the cities of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus, and helped preserve the orthodoxy of the faith. One of the defining marks of the holy church is that it has always adhered to the Nicene Creed and acknowledged the fundamental, non-negotiable affirmations of the early church councils.

Another critical part of the church's DNA is its approach to worship. The early church gathered to worship God. He was the audience. By the middle of the first century, Christian worship was known by the term *liturgy*, which means "the work of the people." The earliest liturgy was written by St. James, the brother of the Lord, as the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

The two major pillars of the church's gathering were the Word - teaching and abiding in the pure doctrine of the apostles - and the worship, in which the Eucharist was the center. The early believers gathered to hear the Word and partake of the Holy Communion and then went out to be His witnesses.

This liturgical pattern of worship continues to be a defining mark of orthodox churches today. The Word of God and the holy traditions of the early church are central to the life of the church.

The Scarlet Thread

We've been concentrating on the DNA of the church, but can we step back for a moment to look at the bigger picture? It's so easy to get lost in minor or even major issues and miss the wood for the trees.

When we think of the birth of the church, our minds naturally go to AD 34, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of the Pentecost.⁴

This is of course correct, but to grasp the full picture of the people of God represented by the church, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible.

The theme of the whole Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. As someone said, there is a scarlet thread that runs through all of the Scripture, which is the blood of Christ. The 39 books of the Old Testament speak of God's eternal plan for man's redemption, continually revealing a picture of the promised Messiah through types, shadows, images and worship patterns. The first time this is seen is in Genesis 3:15, where the first prophecy in the Scripture is given about how Jesus would come to crush Satan. This prophecy also foretells the birth of Jesus. Another example is found in the first Passover, when those who had drawn the blood of a lamb on their doorposts were saved from destruction.⁵ This was a symbol of Jesus, the Lamb of God, shedding His blood to save us from eternal condemnation.

Other examples are found in the serpent that was put up on a pole,⁶ a symbol of Jesus dying on the cross for us.

⁴Acts 2 ⁵Exodus 12 ⁶Numbers 21:8-9.

Isaiah's prophecies⁷ also speak of Jesus. All these different symbols and events point to one thing: The Messiah Jesus Christ and redemption through His death on the cross.

The Old Testament closes with the anticipation of Christ's incarnation.⁸ This prophecy was followed by 400 years of silence, which was finally broken when the angel Gabriel announced to a young virgin named Mary that she would have a son. This was the fulfilment of a 700-year old prophecy.

The birth of Jesus was the biggest event in history. God became to be the eternal sacrifice to redeem man from sin and damnation. And not only was it an event *in* history, it was an event *for* history. His life, death and resurrection would change everything for mankind.

Why did God do this? What could have motivated Him to pay such a great price... pouring out His own holy blood and dying on a cross? Paul Billheimer in his classic book *Destined for the Throne* helps us understand the reason. He explains that the purpose of the whole creation was for God to find a bride for His Son.

The heart of the cross of Christ was to gather the people of God as the body, the bride of Christ. St. Paul says the church was a mystery that was hidden in the heart of God, something that He had on His mind from eternity past, but was not revealed until Jesus Christ came.⁹ The four Gospels tell us about the thirty-three-and-a-half years of Christ's life on earth. Everything that was written in the Old Testament came to life and fulfilment when "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."¹⁰ The story begins with the birth of Jesus Christ, the God-

⁷Isaiah 9, 53 ⁸Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 7:14 ⁹Ephesians 3:7-11 ¹⁰St. John 1:14.

man, from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Christ lived, did all His Father told Him to do, both in word and deed, trained the 12 disciples to be proclaimers of the Gospel, was crucified, rose again and ascended to heaven. After His ascension, God sent the Holy Spirit upon Christ's disciples,¹¹ empowering them to preach the Gospel to the end of the earth, just as Jesus had said.¹² The Book of Acts is the 30-year history of how the apostles preached the Gospel and how the first church was born as a result. The church was born on the day of the Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. As a result of St. Peter preaching the gospel to the multitude gathered that day, 3000 people believed in Christ and were baptized. When the first Christian community began, they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.¹³

As time went by, the church became more organized and the gospel spread, resulting in the birth of local churches, which functioned under the apostles' guidance.¹⁴ From Jerusalem, the message of Christ spread throughout Judea and Samaria¹⁵ to Antioch and the Gentiles.¹⁶ The church began to appear throughout Asia Minor and the Roman Empire. The church was not simply another human organization, but "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."¹⁷ The church was a living, dynamic organism - the living Body of Christ on earth. The church became an agent of change and transformation for individuals, families and whole nations. Then from Romans to Jude, we read instructions guiding both the teaching and practical aspects of how the holy church should function.

¹¹Acts 2 ¹²St. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8 ¹³Acts 2:24 ¹⁴Acts 6, 15 ¹⁵Acts 8 ¹⁶Acts 13

¹⁷Ephesians 2:22.

And finally, you have the Book of Revelation, which is a consummation, the end of all. It prophesies the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, the great marriage supper of the Lamb of God, and thus the mystery is fulfilled.¹⁸

It is important we see the whole Bible, with its one simple theme of Christ and His bride, as the foundation of the holy church. The people of God in the Old Testament looked forward to the cross by faith¹⁹ and we, the post-crucifixion people of God, look back by faith. But we are all made the people of God by one means, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and our belief in Him.²⁰

Yet, as the saying goes, “all that glitters is not gold.” Just because people gather and carry out their church activities doesn’t mean they carry the real DNA of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” A church can exist, hold meetings and look like a church, but not really be a part of the Body of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the holy church was saved from heretics and false prophets for the first 1000 years of its history. There was only one church, and it held on to the orthodox faith and holy traditions of the apostles and fathers of the faith. There was no division in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, until the Roman Catholic Church in the West decided to separate from the Eastern Church.

There have been many different churches, known by many different names, throughout the history of the church, especially after the Reformation of AD 1500. But

¹⁸Revelation 19: 6-9 ¹⁹Hebrews 11:10 ²⁰St. John 1:12; Galatians 3:26; Romans 5:10.

any church that adheres to the same faith and traditions of the ancient church can say it is part of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”

The Believers Eastern Church, with its 15000 parishes spread across the world, follows the faith and holy traditions of the holy church that began in the first century. We adhere to the Nicene Creed and the fundamental doctrines of the early church councils. Following the Eastern stream, we use the liturgy written by St. James, the brother of the Lord. We believe in the apostolic succession, the Holy Trinity and living a sacramental life and are deeply committed to spreading the love of Christ by word and deed as He commanded us to.²¹

²¹Hebrews 13:20-21.

2

WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

*“As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?”*

PSALM 42:1-2

Worship is a journey, a journey with God, to know Him, love Him and be more like Him. We go to church to meet God, worship Him, to gaze upon Him who sits on the throne and as the moon reflects the sun, we, the people of God, infused by the mystery of God's presence and its effect, get transformed and reflect God's nature to all around us. And as we journey onward, we become more and more like the One we adore, admire and interact in worship – which is God's eternal plan and purpose for us.¹

Worship is our gathering “unto Him.”² Going to church is not for us to be entertained, make ourselves happy by listening to some music or make us smarter by the eloquent preaching of a man. God is the audience and we go to church to meet with God.³ Worship is not a duty, but our heart's longing to experience love – learning of love by worshipping God who is love. “My soul longs, yes, even faints, For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”⁴ God made us for Himself and it is the nature of the spirit in us to worship. The question is, do we choose to worship the living true God, or the “gods” of our creation and imagination.⁵

Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”⁶ God is calling for His

¹Romans 8:29, II Corinthians 3:18 ²Genesis 49:10 ³Isaiah 6:1-8 ⁴Psalms 84:2

⁵Romans 1:21-25 ⁶St. John 4:24.

holy church to come to His presence and worship Him. And we respond to His call, as we go to church for the sole purpose of worshipping Him.

It was St. Augustine who said, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”⁷

Some misunderstand worshipping God as a means to appease God of His wrath, or get worldly benefits. But in reality, even when man doesn’t fully understand, his heart, from its depths, is crying out for meaning for life, which can only be found in communion with the Creator.

Adam and Eve did not have to make an altar of worship and offer sacrifice for they were in the very presence of God, without sin and separation. After they walked away from God, we find their children Cain and Abel expressing their heart’s longing to know and please God through worship. From then on, human history is one of man’s unquenchable thirst to commune with God.

Saint Athanasius the Great, of the 4th century, said, “We can become gods.” He does not mean that we humans can turn into the Almighty Creator God, or even into the petty deities that the pagans worshipped. But we can be transformed by our union with the living God as we worship Him. We can take on the nature of the One whom we worship. We are given the privilege of communion, by which we share a union without fusion, as God the Creator and Man the created being, come to be one with each other. True worship allows us to enter into this intimacy with God, beyond just emotions, mere respect and intellectual understanding. Worship then is

⁷<http://christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/augustine>.

not just honouring or living in great awe and fear of God, but it involves true “veneration,” seeing Him “worthy” of our worship, which motivates us to bow down, kneel or raise our hands.

When Isaiah the prophet saw God on the throne in the midst of the worship that was going on in Heaven, he saw the entire Heaven moved visibly by various actions. That was the result of true veneration. This was communion in its purest sense and it brought about the transformation in Isaiah’s life.⁸

Called to Worship

All religions in the world have one thing in common - people gathering together to worship. Some, unfortunately deceived by Satan, end up in false worship which further removes them from the true and only living God. This is the reason why God’s Word is our only true source of knowing how we may worship Him, the Creator and Sustainer of all.

So, why do we go to church? It is God’s desire that His people gather together to be with Him to worship Him. We remain empty and meaningless without the fulfilment we get through communion with our Creator. One of the historical examples of this is found in the book of Exodus. The children of Israel were in ancient Egypt for 400 years. Much of their lives was filled with pain and sorrow due to the slavery they were put to. They were under rulers who did not know the Living God. Then God called His chosen man Moses to deliver them out of Egypt, from the bondage of slavery. God promised them a beautiful

⁸Isaiah 6:1-7.

land where they listen to what God told Moses; also listen to what God asked Moses to tell Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. God did not say anything about the suffering of His people... how they deserved their freedom or what His plans for them were. Instead, He said: "Let My people go, so that they may worship me in..."⁹ What this shows us is that, while all blessings and other promises will be fulfilled, at the heart of all this is the vertical relationship of God's people with Him, through worship. This is the call of the holy church and everything else will flow out of their worship and communion with God.

The Meaning of Worship

When we plan a trip to a distant land, we always resort to a road map that tells us how to get there. So it is with worship of the living God. The road map for true worship is the Scripture. Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth."¹⁰ So when we are told to worship God in "spirit and truth,"¹¹ the context of worship how it is given to us in the Word of God and the holy traditions that help are the practical aspects of it from the ancient orthodox faith of the church. In worship, the two most important elements are the Word of God and the Sacrament. This is why in Believers Eastern Church we give much importance to reading and teaching the Word of God, which is part of pure orthodox faith which has remained true for 2000 years.

Then too, it says, worship must be spiritual.¹² What does it mean? This does not refer to any emotional sensation we may feel or even to our singing. Rather it's

⁹Exodus: 7:16 NIV ¹⁰St. John: 17:17 ¹¹St. John 4:24 ¹²St. John 4:24.

about something deeper ... the experience of entering into the spiritual, invisible realm of God's dimension.¹³

When God's people gather for worship, it is important to know that we are not starting worship as such, rather, we are joining in the heavenly worship that has been going on from eternity past and will continue forever into eternity future. The Prophet Isaiah was given the privilege of having a glimpse of the worship that was taking place in heaven.¹⁴ While this particular account is from the Old Testament time, Apostle John was given the exact same vision 800 years later!¹⁵ What this should remind us is that, worship here in time and space should reflect the focus and purpose of heavenly worship. Our worship should reflect heavenly worship, where more than anything else, God Almighty, the Holy Trinity is the audience and object of our adoration. In worship everything else becomes like shadows and "We see Him..."¹⁶ and bow before Him in worship.

For our worship to be spiritual, we must recognize, as it is mentioned in our liturgy, that we are in the presence of the Holy Trinity, God on His throne, the holy angels and all the saints in heaven (all the people of God who died and are now in the presence of God) - the great cloud of witnesses, known as the Church Triumphant.¹⁷

Bible is an eastern book. Worship narration of the Scripture can be best understood from the eastern world view which has lots of images, pictures, visuals - that our five senses can feel or touch. The western mindset is more of abstract, logic and reason based. In the Biblical

¹³Isaiah 6; Revelation 4, 5 ¹⁴Isaiah 6:1-7 ¹⁵Revelation 4:6-10; 5:6-10, ¹⁶I John 3:2,

¹⁷Hebrews 12:1, 22-24.

worship, which is eastern in its approach, it has the mystery and awe in the worship of the Almighty God who sits on the throne. (Read Revelation chapter 4 & 5 to get a picture of it)

Now we understand the meaning of the thrones, altar, lighted candles, incense, prayers and the deep sense of reverence we experience in worship (For further explanation: Read our books *The Worship of the Church* and *Eucharist* published by Believers Eastern Church). When true worship takes place, we experience God's ultimate purpose for our existence.

Spiritual Dimension

I would like to explain a bit more about the meaning of “worship in the spirit”¹⁸ based on the Pre-Nicene fathers and fathers of faith from the early centuries.

There are specific laws relating to time and space which govern our life and all that we experience here in our lives on earth. But another dimension exists which is invisible to our naked eye, but very real – even more real than the visible world. In worship it can be called “heavenly dimension.”

We cannot understand or comprehend God with our finite minds. Why? Because God is in no way constrained by space and time. He dwells in the heavenly kingdom, beyond the limits of our finite realm.¹⁹

When we read the account of the ascension of Jesus in the Book of Acts²⁰ we think of it as a trip through space ... going up and up and then disappearing beyond

¹⁸St. John 4:24 ¹⁹Romans 11:33; Ephesians 1:15; 3:18 ²⁰Acts 1:9.

sight, like an airplane. The truth is, He left the earthly and visible dimension of space and time, and entered the invisible and eternal heavenly dimension, governed by its own laws.

While heaven is invisible to the earthly dimension, it cannot be separated from the earthly dimension. In a mysterious way, the two move on together. Why else would Jesus say, “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”²¹ At the same time, the Scripture says, He is seated on the throne at the right hand of God the Father.²²

The church on earth, then, lives simultaneously in both the heavenly and the earthly realms. This is the reason we must embrace the invisible dimension by faith and engage our five senses to help us enter into the heavenly worship in the presence of the Holy Trinity.

We as humans perceive, understand and experience the world around us, both visible and invisible, through our five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. During the Divine Liturgy, the church on earth joins the worship in heaven to the Almighty God. He is the King of kings and Lord of all. The Lord is present in the heavenly dimension. And it is spiritual. We worship Him where He is! Wherever we may be, we have the ability to look away from our world and be in the presence of God by our choice.

Eucharist – The Heart of Worship

The people of God, under the Old Testament, celebrated the Passover regularly that redeemed them by offering

²¹St. Matthew 28:20 ²²St. Mark 16:19.

the blood of the innocent lamb.²³ And we in the New Covenant are told “Christ” is our Passover lamb.²⁴ In the first century, the enemies of Christians accused them of cannibalism. They thought the bread and the wine they had during the Holy Communion were in reality the blood and bodies of babies who were slaughtered for this divine ritual. Worship of the true God has always been about sacrifice, shedding of innocent blood for the guilty, even in the first act of worship recorded in the Bible.²⁵

When God spared Isaac, his father Abraham, offered a blood sacrifice to God on the altar as worship to God. Jesus became the fulfilment of all the sacrifice of animals under the Old covenant.²⁶ What is the importance of “blood” in worship? The answer is found in the Book of Leviticus which is the liturgical guide for worship. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.”²⁷ Blood is for making atonement for the soul. We are created beings; Adam walked away from this loving God.²⁸ We cannot directly be in communion with the uncreated Being, God, except through Christ’s death on the cross. Shedding His holy blood became the only way man could be reconciled to God. God became man and through His sacrificial death and resurrection, man now can once again enter into the presence of God.

Some people think God killed Jesus to appease His anger against mankind – like dismissing the criminal charges of man against God. They are missing the point of what atonement is all about. It is not about deleting legal criminal charges relating to God’s law, but rather about our union and communion with God - through

²³Exodus 12 ²⁴I Corinthians 5:7 ²⁵Genesis 4:3-5 ²⁶Hebrews 9:11-14

²⁷Leviticus 17:11a ²⁸I Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:14.

God becoming a man, subjected to all suffering and sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection, and by faith through His life and death, through faith in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the blood was sprinkled on people; a picture of life that was poured out to bring forgiveness.²⁹

Sacrifice is intimately linked with the words, sacred, sanctifying or sacrament. The Latin word for sacrament is *sacerdos*, which means “priest.” When we meditate on Christian worship, what Jesus said about sacrifice becomes very significant. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”³⁰ Some of Christ’s followers hearing these words walked away from Him for they understood the seriousness of what He was saying.

Here, the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, God became incarnate as a human being, and we are given the privilege of experiencing an intimate communion with God through the Holy Body and Holy Blood. This is the mystery of the Holy Communion and the reason why it is the heart of worship.

We must go to church to experience the same wonder, awe and transformation that took place in the lives of Prophet Isaiah³¹ and St. John the Apostle. And we too behold the Lamb who sits on the throne, as though He were slain, and fall before Him and worship Him.³²

²⁹Leviticus 17:11 ³⁰St. John 6: 53-56 ³¹Isaiah 6 ³²Revelation 4:16; 5:6.

The altar and the holy elements carry the mystical presence of the Living Christ and what we experience in worship is not only the Word read and taught pointing us to Christ our Lord, but also, when the Eucharist is received, we truly experience the reality of worship in “spirit and truth.”³³

True Biblical worship demands that we come to Christ as a community and be led in its worship by an ordained sacramental priesthood. The truth is, the fullness of worship is not possible outside of the community of the people of God. A family is not one person, but many. So it is - the family of God invited by the Father to gather for worship. We go to church to meet the Holy Trinity, and worship Him alone with the angels, arch angels, and all the saints that are present in the worship.³⁴ Then we are sent out to the world, to be His living witnesses.³⁵

So then, in Eucharist, we experience the mystical presence of the risen Christ with us, in worship.³⁶ The orthodox worship of the holy church for 2000 years observed the Word and Sacrament as the heart of worship. The invisible eternal Word becomes the visible Living Word³⁷ in the holy sacrament. This is a holy mystery. We don't just look at it, but we look through it and see His death, His Resurrection and His promised Second Coming.

The church fathers struggled to understand what the Scripture said about the Holy Communion and to decipher its original meaning. They concluded that it was the meeting point of the “the imminent and the

³³St. John 4:24 ³⁴Hebrews 12:22-24 ³⁵Acts 1:8; St. Matthew 5:14-16 ³⁶Hebrews 10:19-22 ³⁷St. John 1:1-14.

transcendent” in a mystical way; and that, this “image” represents the reality in the present “now,” with the real presence of Christ, for the individual Christian and the community of Christ, in their midst. It is a difficult truth for our sensible and logical minds to grasp: that substance and symbol are the same.

The only way to understand this is by seeing it as the holy mystery that it is. Unless we delve deep into the mind of the early church fathers, this most important sacrament can become an abstract act, far removed from the present reality, or just a formal ceremony that we do as part of normal community fellowship.

Proof of that is seen if one takes a look at the laity’s casual approach to this most Holy Sacrament or even the lack of reverence with which it is conducted and administered by many churches today.

One thing is certain. The use of the word “symbol” in common parlance is not the way the church fathers understood it. For them, the bread and wine implied a present reality that was timeless. For them, Jesus was and would always be present in the Eucharist.³⁸

Liturgical Worship

Now the question is, how can we worship the Lord in spirit and truth? Are there any practical steps that help us to conduct our worship as we ought to? Recently, a Protestant pastor told someone I know, that while he had a congregation with several thousands who came to his

³⁸*Eucharist*, Copyright 2017, by Dr. K. P. Yohannan Metropolitan; Published by Believers Eastern Church, Faith and Tradition Series.

“church” on Sunday, he later realized they had come to enjoy the music and his Bible Study. If these were taken away, the majority would not show up. It is sad, but true, that much of the free church gatherings are more like stage shows.

But the Divine Liturgy is the roadmap that helps all to be one, in praise, in response and in action as the people of God engage in worship. The very word “Liturgy” means “worship/work of the people” and not of just one person. The emphasis here is on the people of God worshipping together.

We are not inventors of the church. We are part of a whole, which has a history of over 2000 years and we blend into that great whole, everlasting and eternal worship. We must heed the faith and traditions handed down to the church by the apostles and church fathers. We pray and respond just as St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James and the church fathers did as we follow their example as to “how” to conduct our worship service. So now, after 2000 years, we are given the privilege to become part of the authentic, timeless and ancient church.

The first Christians were the Jewish converts and these God- fearing believers passed on to Christian worship, their forms of worship with its sense of order, such as reading of the Word, teaching it, prayer, confession, blessings, sacrament and benedictions etc.

In the earliest account of worship mentioned in the New Testament, we see the spontaneity inspired by the

Holy Spirit. Soon, they got organized to avoid confusion both in governance and corporate worship.³⁹

The Church at Corinth did have non-Jewish members who were from a Gentile background who had no understanding of the worship of the living God and the need for order or liturgy and they began to lose control, letting things get disorderly. St. Paul had to correct them.⁴⁰

By the middle of the second century (AD 150), liturgical worship was led by the church fathers and this pattern came to be followed by all local parishes everywhere.

In the beginning, because of persecution and other restrictive reasons, Sunday service was held in homes with the bishop as the celebrant. We get a brief description of a Sunday worship as written to the church in Rome by St. Justin, a teacher, in the year AD 150. He became a follower of Christ in Ephesus and later came to Rome, where he was martyred in AD 165 for his faith in Christ. In AD 200 a priest named Hippolytus discovered a manual called “The Apostolic Traditions” in which was compiled the customs and importance of signs and symbols of the church. This also confirms the use of an orderly liturgical worship in the ancient church.

The church in Jerusalem named its liturgy after St. James, who was also the first Bishop of Jerusalem. Of course, later, many other liturgies were developed, the famous St. John Chrysostom’s Liturgy of the East, in the 4th century.

Liturgy does two things. First, it is a worship which takes the worshiper out of the mundane world into the

³⁹Acts 2 ⁴⁰1 Corinthians 11,12,14.

dimensions of the spirit, to worship in spirit and truth. Second, it is an expression of the message of salvation conveyed from eternity to eternity through our human senses.

Why Liturgical Worship?

In Liturgical worship there is no surprise as to what happens next, for it belongs to all people and they all knew the order and content. C.S. Lewis always believed that a congregation should properly and profitably offer worship to God. “Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best - if you like, it “works” best - when, through long familiarity, we don’t have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we are almost unaware of; our attention would be on God.”⁴¹

There are three aspects to liturgical worship: Order, Ritual and Ceremonial. These are found in all liturgies throughout the history of the church and we find them in the worship of the people of God in the Old Testament, too.

Order - This is the structural framework, its shape and design. This is like the blueprint of the building.

“Order” in worship is like the skeleton of the body. If

⁴¹C. S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer.

all the bones are taken out of the body, what is left? The train runs on rails. Those rails are “the order” without which the engine can only stay in a place and make a lot of noise, but go nowhere.

In some ways, that is what happened in the Church at Corinth. Their service was filled with confusion and commotion. Apostle Paul had to instruct them in detail to bring order in their worship. A game without rules will not work.

God is a God of order. Just look at the sky and you see the order with which every detail works perfectly. The sun, moon and stars all move according to the absolute fixed pattern. A fixed order is necessary if worship is to be corporate. People must know what to expect, what comes next. If people don't know the order, they cannot be active participants.

Liturgy is *NOT* a personal exercise of devotion performed in public. Liturgy involves the priest and the people as one body. The priest and the people, both turn to the altar as they pray and offer praise and adoration to God. Neither the priest nor those that assist him does the worship for the people. There is no mediator in worship. The corporate character of the liturgy allows all participants know where and when their respective parts come in the service. There is no suspense or surprise.

A well ordered worship liturgy has its own beautiful arrangements, and has a meaningful rhythm of movement and progress. This kind of worship is called “the journey of worship.” During this worship, when the priest turns to the people and pronounces “Peace be with you,” it is an exhortation to follow him as we continue to worship our Lord. He is taking the people through this journey of worship.

There are four specific parts in the liturgy that we gather from the Book of Acts, from the first century church.

- The first involves Gathering to prepare the people for worship. It includes greetings, confession, singing and prayer.
- Then there is the Liturgy of the Word, when people listen to the Word and respond with praise, faith (creed) and petition (intercession).
- The next is the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ.
- And finally, we have the Sending or Dismissal, which brings the people's worship to a close and sends them out to witness and service.

There are some extreme groups that don't have any order at all, nor any deep-formed contemplation behind what they do and why they do what they do. Some, in the name of the Holy Spirit, crawl like snakes, bark like dogs or speak in tongues that no one understands (The Bible says, one should not speak in tongues in the church if there is no interpreter). False prophets make their prophecies which are no prophecies at all, according to the Bible. The whole thing is at best an organized confusion. At worst, it's no different from non-Christian worship of hysteria and emotional stirring.

In the Church at Corinth, they abused the Holy Communion with disrespect. There was strife and disunity and quarrel in the church. What prevailed within the church was resentment and a lack of fear of God. Women never covered their heads in church. Abuse and misuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, false prophecies and false

teachings and a dozen other spiritual problems existed in their church. If one is willing to read 1 Corinthians, chapters 10, 11, 12 and 14, that would be enough to get a sense of what the church was like then ... no order, no discipline. This is why, we should have a Liturgy which brings in the much needed order to the worship service.

Ritual- Liturgical worship is ritualistic. Ritual is the vocal organ of liturgy. The words are said or sung. It vocalizes and interprets the meaning of what worshipers do together. The liturgy begins with the glorification of God as one in Trinity. It starts with the definition of God and identifies Jesus as God incarnate. The words, "Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit," are repeated as part of the adoration of the Holy Trinity through the worship.

Then comes the reading and hearing of the Word of God. According to the church calendar given in the lectionary, passages are read both from the Old Testament, Psalms, the New Testament and the holy Gospels.

Special emphasis is given to the reading of the Gospel. The congregation stands to hear the Gospel reading and respond, "So we believe and affirm."

There are the prayers, adoration of the Holy Trinity, singing, Gloria, blessings etc. that are all part of the ritual in liturgical worship.

Ceremonial- It is the ceremonial part that includes the "things" done in worship, including the holy sacrament that is celebrated. They include certain gestures and symbols like the sign of the cross, censuring, bowing, kneeling, mixing of wine and water, washing of hands

by the priest before handling the bread and wine, raised hands, raising faces to heaven in prayers and so on, which speak volumes of the spiritual reality and concepts.

These things are not just done by the priest. All of the people of God participate in it. All stand to hear the Gospel being read, all go to the altar to receive the Holy Communion and all receive the blessing accompanied by the sign of the cross.

The architectural designs, furnishings, ornaments, lit candles, altar tables, incense, and vestment are also part of the ceremonial part of the liturgical worship.

In all forms of worship and communication we have to use symbolism. New and varied forms or symbols that interpret the intangible to be known through our senses are developed as the need arises. This we see in the many changes made in the liturgies throughout the church history, without changing the core of the liturgy.

There always exists a danger of symbols becoming an idol. This happened to the people of God in the Old Testament when the brazen serpent that God gave them to see His grace through, became the object of worship in the end, thereby becoming a sin to them.⁴²

While the danger is less in the case of audible and verbal symbols, we must still be alive to the danger of it. The Bible, singing, the sacrament, preaching can become the end in itself and we can miss the true worship of the living God. We do not need to look very far to find proof of this. All we need is to take a look at the damage done by the many church growth inventions and the prosperity

⁴²Numbers 21:8-9.

gospel movements, where “man” has become the reason for gathering.

The problem does not lie in the symbols but the misuse of them, which means that the God of all creation is pushed to the background and obstructed by these visuals that should only serve to bring us closer to Him.

We humans are made of body, soul and spirit. Worship becomes meaningful and complete when all our senses are involved and the ceremonial part of the liturgy is a vital part of worship. This is something we see throughout the Word of God both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In certain Eastern churches, the priests have certain specially made head coverings that they use on behalf of the church, the Bride of Christ.

This is often criticized on the basis of the statement that man should not cover his head. The symbolism here is different. The priest or bishop does not present himself as man. They represent the church. The church is the bride of the Lamb and the bride covers her head as a mark of respect to the groom, Christ. The priest wears the cassock which actually represents the dress of the servants. The calling to be the servant of God is visually represented by what they wear.

The whole purpose of the symbolism is to convey the message to and through our five senses, so that we may experience a deep sense of the majesty of God and awesomeness of the holy mysteries. We are privileged to celebrate this through liturgical worship.

Why we adhere to liturgical worship

Since there are many reasons, let's go through them one by one:

One: A common liturgy helps build unity in churches like Believers Eastern Church that has thousands of congregations, spread out it in many nations, representing hundreds of different languages and cultures. The one thing that binds us all together, regardless of nation, colour, language, education, background etc, is our liturgy. We all keep the Christian calendar in the journey of faith. When the Lenten season comes, all of our churches everywhere become part of it. On a given Sunday, the four Scripture portions read will be the same, whether the church is in Vietnam, Dhaka, Kathmandu, a valley in the Himalayas, Mumbai or Sri Lanka. We all say the same creed and pray for the same prayer requests.

Two: It binds us with all churches of all ages across the world, that follow the apostolic teachings and maintain the liturgical worship that began 2000 years ago. We are part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church through liturgical worship. We did not create the church. We did not start it; neither did the generation before us. For millennia, faithful men and women have passed from generation to generation the essence and process of what it means to worship God. We are, in our time, another link in the chain of the church of the living God.

Three: This keeps the church from false doctrines. The Nicene Creed, the consistent proclamation

and teaching of God's Word, and other parts of the liturgy protect the people of God from false teachings.

Four: It protects the church from man-centred worship. The liturgy keeps the congregation from following one individual's whims and wishes, which is unfortunately what happens in many or most independent churches.

Five: It helps us to be a community. In this culture of radical individuality, values and spontaneity, the liturgy grounds us in history and makes us part of something enduring.

Six: Liturgical worship is Trinitarian. The emphasis is on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which is the heart of Biblical worship.

Seven: It helps children grow in an atmosphere of worship with holy traditions that provide stability and pay reverence to God.

Eight: It is both spontaneous and predictable with great depths of theology. Its use of the Scripture and ways that keep our "senses" involved, deepens our engagement during worship.

Nine: It reminds us that we are not of this world, and it helps us join the angels and archangels and all the hosts in heaven, in worship.

Ten: It is based on the pattern of worship given by God. God invites us to meet Him, God cleanses us, He consecrates us and commissions us to represent Him.

Eleven: It is orderly and meaningful, with a definitive beginning, progressing in an orderly way to the end.

Twelve: It has a sense of reverence and instills in us the feeling that we are here to meet God. There is a sense of mystery, which is an important part of worship.

Thirteen: During liturgical worship, we focus on God. God is the audience. We respond by saying, “You are God.”

SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST

*“He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.
For by Him all things were created
that are in heaven and that are on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or
principalities or powers.
All things were created through Him and for Him.
And He is before all things,
and in Him all things consist.
And He is the head of the body,
the church, who is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead, that in all things
He may have the preeminence.
For it pleased the Father that in Him
all the fullness should dwell.”*

COLOSSIANS 1:15–19

A guiding principle of Believers Eastern Church is the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ in our worship and personal life. All things—everything we see, know and do—are centred around Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus Christ is supreme, I am convinced the most important thing in the world is not doing missions work or having all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is not doing great and wonderful things for God. It is not becoming rich and famous. It is not having a wonderful wife or husband or healthy children. It is not achieving significant positions and titles. The most important thing in the whole world is to know Jesus Christ intimately and to become like Him in every way. This is His purpose for our lives.

Romans 8:28 tells us, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.” Please notice that this verse says *purpose* (singular), not *purposes* (plural)—not for us to become evangelists and missionaries and turn the whole world upside-down and have the greatest missionary movement. There is only *one* purpose.

A lot of times, people quote this verse in times of trouble, misinterpreting what is actually being said by reading it out of context. We must look closely at the verse following to understand the singular purpose God

has for all believers: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*”¹ (emphasis mine).

God’s one purpose for our lives, as seen in Romans 8:28–29, is for us to become like His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. For when we truly become like Jesus, we will understand His will and His plan for the world, having the mind of Christ.² And just like the mind tells the physical body what to do, His Body will move in perfect obedience, following His exact will and command. It is like my mind telling my legs to stand, walk or run. He is the Head with the will and the plan, and we are His Body that obeys.

Becoming like Christ is such a vital element to Believers Eastern Church. Someone can say they are one in Christ, there is one God, one doctrine and all those good things, but all this is meaningless if it does not move beyond mere head knowledge and into daily life. As human beings, our tendency is to focus on our traditions, our systems, our joy, our excitement and our emotions. But this is exactly why so many believers never become Christlike, leaving church each week still lying, stealing, gossiping and living with bitterness and no true love in their hearts toward the Lord or their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us never be satisfied with mere head knowledge about Jesus and doctrines, but truly be conformed into His image so that we might know Him, for this is the most important principle of all.

¹Romans 8:29 ²I Corinthians 2:16.

Consider the Pharisees. We usually think of them as mean, evil people, but history shows otherwise. The Pharisees were a group of people that formed 300 years before Christ, when Alexander the Great conquered Jerusalem and brought in the Greek culture and worldview, and the loose living that came with it. Left and right, the people of God began to lose their morality and godly behaviour. So in order to maintain and preserve the purity of the Jewish culture, a group known as the Pharisees formed. Their name means “Separatists” because they separated themselves from the bad influences of the surrounding culture. They were the ones who memorized the Scripture and knew every word of the Law, living with absolute zeal and fire for righteousness and holiness.

But along the way their zeal for God turned sour. Instead of centering their lives around God, they focused on rules and regulations. They became proud and externalized all their religion and faith with a long list of do’s and don’ts to show themselves as righteous to everyone around them. In St. Matthew 23:27, Jesus told the Pharisees that even though they looked spiritual on the outside, within they were just empty and dead. For this Christ condemned them saying, “You study and search the Scripture, but you never come to Me. Even though the Bible is so clearly speaking about Me, you refuse and reject Me. And because of it you will die in your sin”³ (paraphrase). In all their ambition to live a holy life, they missed the main point—to know and love God.⁴ And as a result, they were the very ones who crucified the Lord of Glory.

³St. John 5:39-40 ⁴St. Matthew 22:37.

People are no different today than in Jesus' time. If Jesus were to come in the flesh today, the ones who would crucify Him would not be the wicked, worldly sinners or liberals. Rather, it would be the people who claim, "We are godly, holy, separated people," but in reality are self-righteous, lovers of money, looking like they're godly, but in their hearts denying the Lord Jesus.

That is why I cry out saying, "Let us flee from this superficial, shallow Christianity!" Come out and be separate from this! Today Christianity faces a crisis like never before.

We can only know and truly become like our Lord when He is the focus of our lives, the priority in all that we do and all that we are. My cry to the church is that we must give supreme priority to Jesus Christ in everything—in our church, in our prayer meetings, in our waiting on the Holy Spirit, in our ministry, in our community service, in our home, in our children's lives, in our education centers, in our schools and in our hospitals. In whatever we do, Jesus must have supreme priority. When He is given first place, we become people who are authentic and Christlike from the inside out.

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the

love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”⁵

My prayer for Believers Eastern Church is that we would know His love that surpasses doctrines, systems, policies and traditions. Why? So that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God.” The fullness of God dwells boldly in Christ.⁶ When you see Christ, you see the fullness of God.

And Scripture tells us that the church is to measure up to the fullness of God, as seen in Christ:

. . . endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*⁷ (emphasis mine).

These verses state the goal that we as the church should be striving to attain: “the measure of the stature of Christ.” How do we do this? Not as individuals or lone rangers, but as a group—apostles, presbyters, teachers and evangelists working together for equipping the believers. Why? Because we only become complete in the knowledge of the Son of God and therefore changed into

⁵Ephesians 3:14-19 ⁶Colossians 2:9 ⁷Ephesians 4:3-4, 7, 11-13.

His likeness and image as we live and work together as the Body of Christ.

It sounds so spiritual to say these things, but ultimately, it must be lived out. My brothers and sisters, the only way we can do this is to give Christ first place in our individual lives. Give Him supremacy in each decision you make. The question is not what your parents want, not what your aunt and uncle want, not what you want. The ultimate question is, what does Christ want? Jesus said, “I will build My church.”⁸ The church belongs to Jesus. Those who are born again—those who are a part of Him, who know Him and who love Him—follow and obey Him. Just like a father is the head of the house, Jesus Christ is the head of the church. No one else. He is number one.⁹

This truth is crucial to the life of every church. The Lord calls certain individuals to be clergies, leaders, overseers or bishops, but they are called to serve, not to boss around. They are ministers and servants. The word *minister* actually means “servant or slave.” Jesus Himself took the role of a servant when He washed the disciples’ feet,¹⁰ showing us that the call of a minister or leader is to serve the people. And so, when we gather for worship, Christ is the One lifted up—not the priest, not the teacher, not the worship leader. Jesus *must* be the One who is lifted up!

First in Everything

When believers gather together, it should be clearly evident that Christ is given the priority throughout the whole service. The preaching, teaching and singing

⁸St. Matthew 16:18 ⁹Ephesians 1:22-23 ¹⁰St. John 13.

should all revolve around Christ. If we clap our hands, shout, sing, dance, weep, kneel, bow down or lift our hands, whatever we do, we must ask this one question: Is Jesus Christ being honoured and glorified in this activity, or are the attention and focus being drawn away from Christ? The answer is the key.

In the following sections, we will look at five different areas of our fellowship and life in which we must intentionally focus on making Christ supreme.

In Seasons of the Church

Just like we have seasons and we keep track of time by using calendars, the Christian church has long used the church calendar as an opportunity to celebrate the Christian Faith in worship. The Christian church year and thus the calendar focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus. As a community, when we move through the church calendar, it provides us with an organised way to talk about, reflect upon and respond to the various faith confessions that lie at the heart of the Christian or orthodox faith. These church festivals and cycle of the church also becomes an important vehicle (means) to teach the story of God and His actions in human history to those around us who may not have heard about Christ.

The church calendar is organised around two major sacred events:

Advent, Christmas and Epiphany- this season focuses on the first coming of Jesus and the events surrounding that.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter ending with Pentecost- this season focuses on the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Ordinary time- The rest of the year following the Pentecost we focus on the various aspects of our faith, especially the mission of the church in the world.

So how do we practice this church calendar in our lives? During the different seasons of our Christian calendar, when we gather as a community to worship, we will have specific scripture portions being read, special prayers being prayed, special times of fasting and reflection - all aimed at helping us observe, celebrate and commemorate the sacred events in that season of our journey as Christians. In other words, our lives are centred on Jesus.

In Singing and Adoration

God is our audience in our worship.¹¹ “Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.”¹² That is why, in our churches we have the altar with the Holy Communion at the center, not the pulpit. It’s not about the man who preaches or about the music team that leads that day; it’s about Christ and His sacrifice for us.

The centrality of Christ must be evident in all that we do, especially in our times of singing and adoration during our spiritual services. In our churches, following the traditions of the church fathers and apostles, we have the *thronos* - representing Christ and His sacrifice for us at the center. The focus should not be on the person who preaches or teaches or on the music or choir team that leads that day; rather it should be on Christ and His sacrifice for us. Thus unlike in many modern churches,

¹¹Isaiah 6; Revelation 4,5 ¹²Genesis 49:10 KJV.

the pulpit and choir team are placed towards the side rather than being at the center.

I heard about a church where, when the senior pastor is away on a vacation, the church attendance drops by half! Why? Because people come to hear a person and his brilliance; not to meet God.

This issue of keeping the focus on Jesus is especially important today because of the major shift that has occurred in popular worship music over the past few years. Most worship songs seem to be more about *MY* needs, *MY* problems, *MY* children, *MY* tears, *MY* sickness, *MY* persecution, rather than about Christ. My brothers and sisters, this must not be so. Jesus must be our focus. Worship is not dependent on how we feel or on our emotions. Worship is a decision we make to express our love for Jesus, despite how we may feel. This is exactly what Job did. Even though he had lost so much and it seemed like his world was crumbling all around him, he still worshiped God.¹³ Some churches start singing and beating the drum, and as the drums go faster and faster, the people start moving faster and faster until they go into a frenzy. In the end, the beat of the drum became the focus rather than Jesus.

We must keep a balance between singing songs of our devotion for what the Lord has done for us and singing songs of praise and adoration unto the Lord. I am not against singing songs filled with encouragement and positive thoughts. It is good to remember what the Lord has done for us. But at the same time, those types of songs must not dominate the worship service. They are

¹³Job 1:20.

not the priority. When we come together, we should sing to the Lord as though He were in our midst, standing right before us. This is the kind of format we should have. Let us remember the literal meaning of the word *worship* in Scripture: “falling on one’s face prostrate.”

No matter how long we spend in worship together, Christ must remain the focus, for “unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”¹⁴ As we gather together, everyone—including the priest—is called to offer sacrifices. How do we do that? Hebrews 13:15 tells us to “continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” In this way we bring glory and honour to Him.

Why is all of this so important? Because we become like what we worship. Those who are leading the people in singing must be especially sensitive in understanding this. Everything that is done must point people to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them long for Him and be lost in the wonder of His grace and mercy. Then we will have a vibrant fellowship, impacting our communities like the early church.

In Teaching

Just as Jesus must have first place in our singing and adoration, He must also be given supreme priority in our teaching. Another significant part of a church service is the time we come together for the teaching of God’s Word. To help aid us in systematically following the Scripture and it’s teaching, we follow the lectionary which guides us to the appropriate passages being read

¹⁴Genesis 49:10 KJV.

each week, in accordance with the church season we are in.

Ministry in the church should be to exhort and point people to Christ. This is done by giving Jesus Christ preeminence in our teaching. Jesus said, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”¹⁵ How does the Spirit do this? He does this through the reading and teaching of God’s Word!

The teaching of God’s Word in our churches must be based on 2 Corinthians 3:14–18, removing the veil from people’s faces— the veil of greed, the veil of evil thoughts, the veil of anger, the veil of unbelief, the veil of loving money, the veil of living in darkness, the veil of independent pride and arrogance, and the thousands of other veils that can blind believers.

Our goal in teaching God’s Word must be to point people to Jesus, because it is through His Word that He brings light and truth to people’s lives, the truth that sets the captives free.¹⁶ This is why in the liturgical pattern of worship which our churches follow, we have one among the 4 readings always from the Gospels.

After the veil is removed, the next step, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This is done by helping people see the glory of Jesus in the Word of God. When you see Him, it is absolutely amazing— your heart longs to be like Him,

¹⁵St. John 16:13-14 ¹⁶St. John 8:32.

because our Teacher, the Holy Spirit, not only shows us Christ in the Word, but He also starts working in us, changing us and transforming us little by little until we become like Jesus Christ in all areas of our lives. Finally, when we see Him, we shall be like Him.¹⁷

As the teaching of God's Word changes us, the things around us are affected as well. Our home life begins to change as well as our relationships with others and our response to the situations of life.

A couple of years ago, I did a radio broadcast (which later became a book) entitled, "Christ in Your Home." The number of letters I received from that broadcast was unbelievable! People's whole mindsets began to change as they literally thought and lived as though Christ were physically present among them. People said things like, "It is so amazing! We began to think about Christ literally coming into our home, sitting and eating with us and being with us at our workplace. It has impacted us immensely and changed our perspective." As Jesus is revealed through the teaching of the Word, people come to see how He would act and what He would say in the situations of life.

I want to emphasize one of the most neglected areas of teaching in the church today, so that we will not miss out on what Christ desires for us. That area of teaching is the view on suffering. Unless a believer is willing to die to himself and daily put to death his self-centeredness, he will not become like Jesus.¹⁸ Only through the cross and dying to oneself can we truly know and become like Him.

¹⁷I John 3:2 ¹⁸St. Matthew 16:24.

First Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” This verse is not talking about the cross or the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet. It is referring to the day-to-day suffering Jesus endured for 33 and a half years. He suffered in the flesh by saying “no” to His own desires. He lived a sinless life while on this earth, and His flesh fought Him every step of the way. Even so, He continually denied Himself and asked the Father, “What do You want me to do?” That was His suffering. He accepted suffering, setting an example for us to follow. It is a choice that we make to follow Him in this and by it become like Him. When we understand this, we realize the seriousness of what it means to follow Christ.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew chapter 13 we are told that the Kingdom of God is like a man who finds a hidden treasure in a field. Upon discovering the treasure, he goes and sells all that he has in order to buy the field with the treasure. This is exactly what Jesus did when He gave up His life on the cross. He gave up everything so that we might have life. This is what the Apostle Paul did as well. After 20 years of preaching and after being taken up to heaven and given special revelations, he says,

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by

faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”¹⁹

Apostle Paul gave up everything he had just so that he might gain Christ. His heart longed to know Jesus and to understand Him more and more. When he went through suffering, loneliness, pain, misunderstanding, hunger, starvation, shipwreck and desertion, he simply said, “Lord, now I understand Your suffering. Now I can enter into Your suffering a little more and understand You better. Knowing You is worth it all.”

I pray that you will fall so in love with Jesus Christ to the extent that if your spouse walks away, your children walk away, your friends walk away, you are put in jail, your wealth is taken away or you are brutally beaten and killed, you will still say, “I love Jesus. I heard Him call me to love Him more than father, mother, son, daughter, even my own life. More than anything in this life, I want to know Him. These sufferings can never compare to the joy of knowing my Lord and Saviour.”²⁰ Let this be the mark of maturity for believers in the church. And let commitment, passion and deep love for Jesus Christ be our goals as we teach from God’s Word.

In Character

Why is there disunity, strife, fighting for position, criticizing, arrogance and pride in the church? Why do people put others down, walk in unforgiveness and live in bitterness toward one another? Why is there such a lack of brokenness and humility in so many believers’

¹⁹Philippians 3:7-11 ²⁰Romans 8:18.

lives? Why are there gossip and cliques, division and taking sides, and strained relationships among so many in the church? What is the real reason for such a lack of love and wholeness in our relationships?

The reason, I am convinced, is *because people are not becoming like Jesus in their character.*

This was the same thing that happened in the Church at Corinth. The believers were fighting among themselves with all kinds of jealousy and division.²¹ St. Paul says the reason they had become like this is because they did not have the character of Jesus Christ in their lives.

Some time ago, a friend told me of his experience during the early days of knowing the Lord. One time he asked the Lord, “Why is it that the people who know so much of the Bible and look so spiritual live with such bitterness, unforgiveness, carnality and worldliness, full of self-centredness?” The Lord told him, “Son, the reason is because they spend time with the Bible, but they don’t spend time with Me.” How tragic!

There is a vast difference between knowing the Bible and knowing the Lord. Only when we make Jesus the priority in our inner lives and character will we be changed. Bible knowledge does not change the character of a man; only Jesus can change a man’s character. This is what Psalm 119:9 (NIV) says: “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.” Please notice that it says “*living*” and not just reading God’s Word is the key to living a godly life. Putting God’s Word into practice is the only thing that changes our character and makes us like Christ.²²

²¹I Corinthians 1 ²²St. Matthew 7:24-27.

To become like Jesus is to become broken and humble.²³ We can never experience the humility of Christ and His brokenness without a willingness to humble ourselves and die to oneself. I plead with every person in Believers Eastern Church to read and memorize Philippians 2:1–14, where we are told our attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus, who “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even *the death* of the cross.”²⁴ Let this example of humility that we see in Jesus be seen in our lives as well.

When we become like Jesus, we become humble. The opposite of humility is pride, and pride is the root of all sin. People are proud of all sorts of things—pride of caste, education, title, position, riches, good looks, ability, spiritual gifts and so many others. To be like Jesus is to hate pride like we would hate the most poisonous snake that is coming after us to kill us. When we are humble, it is easy to ask forgiveness from our wife, husband, children, coworker or anyone else when we know we have offended them in some way. Saying “I have sinned. Please forgive me” requires putting pride to death and embracing humility. This is truly putting Jesus first in our character.

To be like Jesus is to hate the pride in our life and recognize it as the spiritual cancer that it is. Cancer causes one part of the physical body to serve only itself, causing all the other parts of the body to suffer and thus, slowly die. Pride is a spiritual cancer that causes us to serve ourselves.

When this happens, we slowly die spiritually. The only

²³St. Matthew 11:29 ²⁴Philippians 2:8.

way to overcome this is to humble ourselves before God and repent.

When Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,²⁵ He was commanding us to live a life of such love and humility in our homes, workplaces and toward one another, serving one another and considering others better than ourselves, that everyone in society will know we are His. This love and humility must be lived out in every aspect of our lives, *especially* in our church life with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But all of this is only possible if Jesus Christ is given supreme priority in our individual lives—in our thought life and in our attitude. Each of us must live in the reality that Jesus is with us each and every moment of the day.

In Spiritual Gifts

Jesus must also have first place in the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? St. Paul explains these in 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of* all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different

²⁵St. John 13:34-35.

kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”

In the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church, Jesus Christ reigns supreme because the Spirit always points us to Jesus. Believers Eastern Church does not encourage anything in our worship that will draw attention to man and away from Christ. For Scripture says, “that no flesh should glory in His presence.”²⁶

This is not to say we stifle the Spirit and are against these gifts. If there is a genuine word from the Lord and the person giving it has belonged to the local church long enough to be known for his humility, his good testimony with people outside and inside the church, his godly way of raising his children and relating to his wife (and a woman must be known for her humble submission to her husband)—if these are true, then let that person say what he feels the Lord would have him say.

If people are like Jesus in handling the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to them, there will be true brokenness, true submission to authority, true love and true mercy without condemnation. There are some people who exalt and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a church service to promote themselves, and in this, Jesus Christ is not honoured.

On the other side, just as there are some who exalt the gifts and use them for their own promotion, there

²⁶I Corinthians 1:29.

are others who say the gifts are no longer in operation but vanished when the Bible was completed. I tell you, I cannot find one single Bible verse that supports this. It cannot be found because it is not there! The Holy Spirit is still alive and active in the church and working in the Body of Christ. How do I know this to be true? Because just as it was in the early church, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given for the edification of the whole Body of Christ. The purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has not changed; it is for today.

One thing is sure: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not toys to be played with. God gives them to us so that we may bless others. Think of a mango tree. The tree bears mangoes, not for itself but for the people. So, too, the Holy Spirit lives to exhort, encourage and strengthen others.²⁷ If we diligently seek to give Christ His rightful place as the center and focus, we will naturally maintain the balance that is so desperately needed in Christianity today.

The key is Jesus. In all things, He is to be our priority. In Revelation 1:1–20, you will find Jesus in the midst of the golden lampstands, which represent the churches. But a few chapters later, we find Jesus is no longer there, but outside: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”²⁸

The church being addressed in that chapter thought to themselves, “We are wealthy and we have the best Bible teachers, all the right doctrines, the most able people and a good reputation. We lack nothing.” This is when Jesus tells them, “Look, I am no longer in your midst. I am standing outside your church. If you open the door, I will

²⁷St. John 16:7–15 ²⁸Revelation 3:20.

come in. You say you are rich and lack nothing, but you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, blind, naked and poor. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be truly rich²⁹(paraphrase).

Take this warning: Jesus can be pushed out of a church today as well. How can a church that was once alive and on fire for the Lord now have Jesus knocking on the outside? I will tell you how. A church will always become like its priest. That is the truth. So if Jesus is no longer in the midst of the church, the priest needs to take responsibility and repent and make his life right before God, setting Jesus as the priority of his life. The priest must take this very seriously and ask God to break him and help him change his ways.

This is very serious. I am deeply convinced that the result of all ministries must be a local church that gives supremacy to Jesus Christ, knowing Him and becoming like Him in every way.

The Result

A church that has Jesus as the center and focus naturally produces good and lasting fruit, because all of the believers are abiding in the Vine, which is Jesus Christ.³⁰ And what is that good fruit? It is a church that extends itself and reaches into the community, calling people young and old from the highways and byways to come to Christ.³¹

When Jesus is given supremacy, the motivation to share God's love with others will automatically be there. That is why it is the minister's or priest's responsibility to teach and exhort, for if the people are fed and cared

²⁹Revelation 3:17-18 ³⁰St. John 15 ³¹St. Luke 14:21-23.

for, they will bear spiritual children. A shepherd does not need to beat sheep into producing lambs, does he? No! The sheep will naturally produce young as they are fed and cared for by the shepherd. Jesus gave the promise that, “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”³² It is guaranteed. Feed the sheep faithfully and you will find peace—no straining or striving to get things done.

Another good and lasting fruit that is produced as Jesus is in the midst of His people is holiness, that is, spiritual maturity and victory over sin. Becoming holy is the result of becoming like Jesus and following Him. Holiness cannot be produced or attained by our good works. It is something that Jesus does within us as we walk with Him day by day.³³

The more we partake of our Lord’s nature, the more we will live on earth as He lived. This is the Spirit-filled life. Jesus did not come to earth as an angel, but like us. The Bible says, “he had to be made like them [or like his brothers] fully human in every way.”³⁴ What God did for Jesus He will gladly do for us, for “He loves us as He loves Jesus.”³⁵ But His power is made available only “to those who believe.”³⁶ So it is because of lack of faith in God’s Word that believers today are impotent and powerless against sin and Satan. Jesus—the one who knew no sin—commands us to follow in His footsteps. The devil would love for us to believe the excuse that we are human and cannot help but to sin occasionally. My brothers and sisters, this is a lie! When we know

³²St. John 15:5 ³³Isaiah 64:6 ³⁴Hebrews 2:17 ³⁵St. John 17:23 ³⁶Ephesians 1:19.

Jesus, when we see that He came in the flesh, just like us, yet did not sin, two things happen. One, we no longer have an excuse for sinning. Two, we have faith that we too can live in victory over sin because Jesus did.³⁷

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I am not promoting sinless perfection. Even Apostle Paul said, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent."³⁸ But there are those who continue to live in defeat for the same habit, the same sin, the same lie, the same temperament, the same deception—what is wrong? The problem is that they have not seen Christ. They have seen everything but Jesus Christ.

We can read all kinds of books, follow different steps and rules, but we will not change until our hearts hunger after the Lord. People never become holy by rituals and traditions or by pretending to be holy and wearing a white shirt. People never become holy by putting on a somber face and speaking in tongues and prophesying. People become holy *only* by seeing and becoming like Jesus Christ.

The local church exists for only one purpose: to obey Jesus Christ. The church is His Body, following His will in this generation. He must have preeminence in everything. All things must be done as if Jesus Christ were doing them Himself, with His humility, His love and His sacrificial giving. As we keep our eyes on Him, we will become more like Him and grow to love Him

³⁷Zac Poonen, *Living As Jesus Lived* (Bangalore, INDIA: Christian Fellowship Centre, 1977), pp. 3, 5. Copyright by Zac Poonen, 16 DaCosta Square, Bangalore-560084.

³⁸I Corinthians 4:4.

more and more. As a result, we will fulfill His plans for our lives and our generation.

Oh, how I pray that everything that happens among Believers Eastern Church will be to magnify, promote and exalt Jesus Christ. May we grow to love Him more and more each day as we make Jesus Christ the supreme priority in our lives.

4

EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“But you shall receive power
when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth. . .
And they were all filled with
the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues,
as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

ACTS 1:8; 2:4

Another guiding principle of Believers Eastern Church is our position concerning the Holy Spirit and His role in the church and in believers' lives. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered the Body of Christ as recorded in Acts 2. From that moment, the Holy Spirit has been at work in the church in a very powerful way.

When the Holy Spirit is given His proper place in the church and in the lives of individual believers, that fellowship will become a dynamic force for change, impacting its community, state, country—even the world—for Jesus Christ.

Acts of the Holy Spirit

When Jesus was physically here on earth, He personally directed the ministry of His disciples. When He sent them out to do the ministry, He told them what to do, how to do it and where to go, and He taught them each step of the way.

Jesus is no longer walking on this earth in His physical body, but He still gives direction to His church through the Holy Spirit. Just as He guided His disciples while He was on the earth, so too He guides us today, through the Holy Spirit.¹

¹St. John 14:26.

The name *Acts* is a shortened version of the book's original title: the *Acts of the Apostles*. The truth is, it really should be titled the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, for if we look closely through its pages, we will see the church as God intended it to be—alive, vibrant and turning the world upside-down by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Almost every event that took place in the book of Acts was started, regulated, empowered and carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was so evident in the disciples' lives that they were called men "who have turned the world upside down."² As a result, we read that angry opponents of the gospel confronted the believers with this charge: "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching."³

As Chuck Smith emphasizes in his book *The Church's Divine Helper*, "What a tremendous witness for the early church! It was filling whole cities with the doctrines of Jesus Christ and turning the world upside down. Would to God that I could be arrested and charged with filling my city with the doctrine of Jesus Christ!"⁴ The only reason the early church had such a significant and incredible impact upon its whole known world was because they daily lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew that His disciples were incapable of doing His will without the Holy Spirit empowering them. That is why His last command to them was to "wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and

²Acts 17:6 ³Acts 5:28 ⁴Smith, *The Church's Divine Helper*, p. 69.

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁵

The disciples obeyed what Jesus said, and in Acts 2 we see how the Holy Spirit first came upon the believers, giving them tremendous power to proclaim the Gospel without fear or compromise. As a result, thousands repented, were baptised and joined the church.⁶ In Acts 24:3 we read, “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

In Acts 3:1–10, a man who had been crippled from birth was healed *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. As a result, many believed in the Lord. Acts 4:13–31 tells how the believers were threatened and warned not to speak about Jesus anymore. Yet as they prayed they were filled *with the power of the Holy Spirit*, and with courage they continued to proclaim the gospel. In Acts 5:1–11, when a couple thought about making a good impression by deception, *the Holy Spirit* revealed it to apostle Peter and judgment took place. In Acts 6:3–7, a group of godly men was selected for leadership with the qualification being men *full of the Holy Spirit*.

In Acts 7:55–59, Stephen, a man *full of the Holy Spirit*, was given the power to proclaim the gospel even in the midst of being persecuted and stoned. In Acts 8:26–40, we read that Philip was led by *the power of the Holy Spirit* to witness to an Ethiopian. It was the Holy Spirit leading and directing Philip in what he should do and say that led to the Ethiopian’s salvation. Acts 9 describes Saul’s Damascus road experience, during which *the Holy Spirit revealed* to him that Jesus was the Messiah.

⁵Acts 1:4–5,8 ⁶Acts 2:41.

In Acts 10:44–48, we see how the new believers were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began speaking in tongues.

Over and over again, through each chapter of Acts, the power of the Holy Spirit is displayed through the lives of simple believers. Their entire lives were lived in the very atmosphere of the Holy Spirit. In Him they lived and moved and had their being.⁷ When we look at the life and devotion of the believers in the Book of Acts and compare them with Christendom at large, it is shocking to see the sad reality that so much of what is being done in the church today has little to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of being a people marked by an intense love and devotion to Christ and living in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, it seems that much of Christianity has degenerated into merely Sunday social clubs.

This is so sad because it is simply impossible to reach our generation with the gospel or to live a victorious Christian life without living in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to serve God as He wants us to without being anointed by the Holy Spirit and receiving His supernatural gifts. Jesus Himself needed to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and His power before He could begin His public ministry.⁸ If even Jesus, the Son of God, needed this anointing, how much more do we? For it is, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”⁹

This is the reason why one of the major emphases of Believers Eastern Church is our commitment to live and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as we read in

⁷Acts 17:28 ⁸Acts 10:38 ⁹Zechariah 4:6.

the Book of Acts, the Lord Jesus does His work through His Body as it operates in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. If He empowered the early church with the Holy Spirit, He will do the same for the church today. As we seek to live this way, we will see God fulfill His plan through our lives in this generation.

Two Experiences

Throughout Scripture we see two phrases at use: one is the Holy Spirit being *in* a believer and another is the Holy Spirit coming *upon* a believer. The word *in* is represented by the Greek preposition *en*, while the word *upon* is represented by the Greek word *epi*. A better translation of the word *epi* is “overflow”—the Holy Spirit flowing out of a believer’s life in abundance.

In Acts 19:2, St. Paul asks the believers at Ephesus if they have received the Holy Spirit *since* they believed. In another passage, Gentiles from Samaria were saved and baptized. When the leaders of the church heard about it, they sent Peter and John to these new believers to minister and pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ These passages show there is a distinct difference between the Holy Spirit in you and being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit *in* You

The Holy Spirit being *in* you is explained by Jesus in St. John 16:8: “[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

¹⁰Acts 8:14-17.

Scripture shows that Jesus came for two reasons: to take away the sins of the world and to baptize with the Holy Spirit: “Behold! The Lamb of God who *takes away the sin of the world!* I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, *this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.*’”¹¹ (emphasis mine)

I want you to think back to your salvation experience. Do you remember the tug on your heart and the deep weight of sin that you felt as your eyes and heart were opened to the fact that you needed a Saviour? That was the Holy Spirit at work in your heart. And even today, He is the One at work in the hearts of the people we witness to, bringing men and women to repentance. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin and opens their eyes to see the truth that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. He testifies of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come and draws people to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be saved.

After an individual opens his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ through repenting of sin and believing in Jesus, the Holy Spirit then comes *into* that person, making his spirit alive in Christ. In St. John 14:17, Jesus told His disciples about this saying, “For [the Holy Spirit] lives with you and will be *in you*” (NIV, emphasis mine). We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is *in you*, whom you have received from God?” (NIV, emphasis mine).

The reason the Holy Spirit comes into our lives the moment we are saved is for the work of sanctification,

¹¹St. John 1:29,33.

the process of making us holy and set apart for God's purposes. We have just been "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,"¹² and the Holy Spirit comes into our lives to teach us how to live in our new life. It's just as if a person were to move to another land, he would have to learn many new things. New believers must learn to live a new way, no longer following "the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."¹³ So, the work of the Holy Spirit is to give believers the power to overcome the old nature and be continually changed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit *upon* You

The Holy Spirit being *upon* you refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. St. John the Baptist declared, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."¹⁴

"It is very significant that the New Testament opens with these two promises: 'He will save His people from their sins'¹⁵ and 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁶ This marked the beginning of a new era in God's dealing with man—the New Covenant, to be saved from our sins and to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. These two things are our birth-right in becoming children of God."¹⁷

It was by the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus' disciples were able to minister in such an incredible way.

¹²Colossians 1:13 ¹³Romans 12:2 ¹⁴St. Matthew 3:11 ¹⁵St. Matthew 1:21

¹⁶St. Matthew 3:11 ¹⁷Based on notes taken from Zac Poonen's teaching, spoken at our Seminary in Tiruvalla, India.

This baptism was the promise Jesus referred to when He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem.¹⁸ And this was what the apostles referred to when speaking to the new believers in Samaria.¹⁹

From Scripture we clearly see that in order to serve God and minister with power, we *must* receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no other way to be effective in our personal life or in service for God apart from it.

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see a wide variety of ways by which people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For example, in Acts 2:2–4 we read of how the Holy Spirit came upon the believers: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

In Acts 8, however, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was imparted by the laying on of hands by St. Paul and St. John. No special manifestations were mentioned. This shows us that there are not always signs and wonders that accompany the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 9, Ananias, who was just a common believer from Damascus, prayed, and St. Paul received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This shows us that God is not dependent upon the prayers of “special” people. All He needs is someone who is obedient and who believes.

In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius, a Gentile, during St. Peter’s message. He began to speak

¹⁸Acts 1:4-5 ¹⁹Acts 8:14-17.

in tongues—the first time the Holy Spirit was given to someone outside of the Jewish community, showing us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for everyone.

As you can see, none of these experiences was identical. This tells us that God is not bound by any particular method or set system on how He does things. What these passages do show us is that we must have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives! We will surely go wrong if we get hung up on what kind of experience we have or have not had, rather than truly knowing the power of the Holy Spirit for ourselves.

Charles Finney was a great evangelist mightily used by God in the 1900s. The key to his life and remarkable ministry was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He writes about his experience in his autobiography:

“Just before evening the thought took possession in my mind that as soon as I was left alone... I would try to pray again... Just at dark Squire Wright, seeing that everything was adjusted, bade me goodnight and went to his home. I accompanied him to the door and as I closed the door and turned around, my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out. And the utterance of my heart was, I want to pour out my whole soul unto God.

The rising of my whole soul was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office to pray. There was no fire and no light in the room and nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face... it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He

said nothing, but he looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet.

... I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and I made such confession as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect.

... I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit —without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me. Without any recollection that I have ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended on me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love, for I could not express it any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I cannot recollect distinctly, but it seemed to fan me like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love. I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. The waves came over me and over me one after another until I recollect I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.' I said, 'Lord, I cannot bear anymore.' And yet I had no fear of death.²⁰

²⁰J. Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House Publishing, 1998), pp. 257–259.

What a mighty experience of being baptized with the Spirit of God!

But truth is most believers do not experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the way Charles Finney did. And unfortunately, many believers do not live in the awesome power of the Holy Spirit in their daily life. Most find their life to be more like an old, rusty water hand pump—a continuous struggle to pump up a few drops of blessing from a dry, dusty and defeated heart. Yet it need not be like that. If only our dryness would drive us to the Lord, things would be much different. The will of God in our lives is to have rivers of blessing flowing from us to touch all we come in contact with.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is pictured as a river flowing from the throne of God and falling to earth.²¹ To be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be immersed under that waterfall. Jesus said that all those who were thirsty could come to Him and receive the Holy Spirit so that rivers of living water could flow out of their innermost being. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”²² But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.²³

The proof of being baptised in the Holy Spirit is a living stream of blessing flowing from your life unto

²¹Revelation 22:1; Acts 2:33 ²²St. John 7:37-39 ²³Taken from an article written by Zac Poonen.

others. Whatever gifts the Holy Spirit imparts to you indicating this baptism is secondary. The important thing is that the blessings (living water) flow out from your life to others. If you aren't blessing others, the water is not flowing. Many believers are fooled into thinking that mere emotional events are the work of the Holy Spirit; they may or may *not* be. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is constant and may go largely unnoticed and without expressed emotion. One thing that is true is that any response or action of man that does not match the nature of Jesus is not of the Holy Spirit.

This overflow of the Holy Spirit makes the words of Jesus very logical, "And you shall be My witnesses..."²⁴ When we bless others, we are representing Jesus well.

If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, seek God and ask Him to do this for you. We know that God is faithful to answer: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"²⁵ And the Bible reminds us, "You do not have because you do not ask God."²⁶

The first step toward receiving the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge your need. Many believers are caught up in foolish arguments about words. But it is power that we need, not correct terminology. What is the use of having our terminology right if we are as dry as a bone? It is far better to be honest and come to God, confessing that the rivers of blessing are not flowing out of us. Having taken that first step, we can trust God to grant us what we ask. Let us then call out to God with all our hearts, and like

²⁴Acts 1:8 ²⁵St. Luke 11:13 ²⁶James 4:2.

Jacob said to God at Peniel, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”²⁷ There is no partiality with God. What He has done for others, He will do for you. Even today, He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.²⁸ God is more than eager to give the Holy Spirit to all who desire to glorify Jesus.

It was in the early 1970s, while serving the Lord in North India, that I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Week after week I was preaching about God’s love in many different places. During one such speaking engagements, I remember feeling so terribly dry, weary and helpless. I had my outlines, my illustrations and my messages, yet there was no power in my life. I felt so empty. That is when I went into my tiny room, knelt beside my bed and cried out to God. I knew that without His help I could not preach that evening. I prayed, “Lord, You promised Your disciples power to witness. I am so dry and empty right now. Please baptize me in the power of the Holy Spirit as You have promised, so that I will be able to serve You and honour You.”

I do not know how long I was crying out to God in desperation. All of a sudden, the power of the Holy Spirit came upon me, and I forgot everything else around me. Wave after wave, His love and power filled my life, and I felt as though I was going to explode. It was the most significant turning point in my entire life.

From that moment on I was never the same again. My love for the Lord was so intense that I would have done absolutely anything that He asked me to do, no matter how ridiculous it may have seemed. I was so

²⁷Genesis 32:26. ²⁸Hebrews 11:6.

overwhelmed with Him, His love and His goodness, that I could not do enough for Him. As I preached that evening, I experienced such power to share so boldly, which I never had before. I couldn't even remember everything that I had said; all I know is that hundreds of people responded to the message that I spoke that night.

I encourage you to please keep your heart open to whatever and however the Lord wants to do His work in your life. Don't look for some spectacular event to happen as you seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Let God do whatever He wants to do, and if He desires to give you some incredible experience or give you the gift of tongues, as it was in my case, let Him do it. Be open and expect Him to baptize you and, by faith, receive His promise for your life.

In my case, I was alone in my room when the Lord baptized me with the Holy Spirit. But in many other cases, it happens through the laying on of hands by a priest or a believer in the church, as it was with Ananias and the Apostle Paul. The important thing is that every believer hunger after the power of the Holy Spirit. Seek His power and anointing, and you will become a true witness of the Lord Jesus Christ in this generation.

Gifts of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit also gives spiritual gifts that aid us in the work of the ministry, so that we can serve God effectively in building up the church as the Body of Christ. These gifts are not something we choose, but rather that which the Lord determines for each of us to have.

In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, St. Paul speaks about the different gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of these

gifts are the word of knowledge, discernment, faith, miracles, healing, gift of tongues and their interpretation, prophecy, administration, teaching, mercy, service and leadership. All these gifts are for the edification of the Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Apostle Paul makes a very important statement concerning the gifts of the Spirit: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” The Lord knows what ministry He has called us to and what gifts of the Spirit will best benefit us in that ministry. This brings us assurance and keeps us from comparing the gifts we have received with the gifts others have received, for the Spirit chooses and gives to each what He wills.

When we see the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of Jesus’ ministry, we see the example of how we should live and serve our Lord. Jesus not only lived a holy life, but He also had a ministry to others. He preached, healed the sick, cast out demons and made disciples. He did not dare serve the Father without being anointed first—as multitudes of believers do today. It is written about Jesus that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.”

What was the result? “He went around doing good and healing [delivering] all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”²⁹

People in the world around us are suffering because Satan has oppressed, harassed and bound them. When

²⁹Acts 10:38, Based on notes taken from Zac Poonen’s teaching, spoken at our Seminary in Tiruvalla, India.

God is with us, we will do what Jesus did—go around doing good to people and delivering them from Satan’s bondage. But only as we have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit

When we talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and living by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is most important that we don’t forget that all of this must produce the end result of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And what is the fruit of the Holy Spirit? “But the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”³⁰

In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth answering their questions about understanding and possessing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. At the same time of their seeking to understand these things, there were great division, gossip and discord among them. That is why St. Paul reminded them that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are useless if they are without love, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit— “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”³¹

³⁰Galatians 5:22-23 ³¹1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

This tells us that if we live by the Holy Spirit, the clearest evidence will be our love for one another. The Church at Corinth was more concerned about having the gifts of the Holy Spirit than they were about bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is absolutely essential that the end of all our understanding and seeking after the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit be the fruit of the Holy Spirit—His love, joy, kindness and goodness—being evident in our lives, bringing glory and honour to our Lord.

In St. Luke 6:44, Jesus said, “Every tree is known by its own fruit.” This is also true when speaking of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the Bible doesn’t just speak of the Spirit, but of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if a believer is living in the power of the Holy Spirit, the evidence will be seen in the holy life he leads.

We must also realize that the power, the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit are given to meet the needs of the people around us—the poor, the oppressed, the blind and the downtrodden. Millions upon millions are heading for a Christless eternity, and the Holy Spirit seeks more than anything else to use us, the followers of Christ, to set them free from the captivity of Satan. But we cannot do this if we do not know the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today the church faces more persecution and hardship than any time in history. More believers have been martyred in this past century than have been in the past 2000 years. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Body of Christ will move forward in sharing with those who still need to hear the name of Jesus for the first time.

Keith Green, a well-known singer and a precious brother in the Lord, once said, “This generation of

believers is responsible for this generation of souls.” We are the Lord Jesus Christ’s witnesses in our world. Like the disciples of the early church, we are the vessels He has chosen to draw a desperate world to Himself. I pray that every believer will seek God for the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we expect to turn the world upside-down for Christ like the early church did.

Let us press on to continually be filled with His Holy Spirit and live in His power, for there is a world out there that is so desperately in need of the Saviour.

5

THE PRIORITY OF THE WORD

Jesus said, "Feed My lambs."

ST. JOHN 21:15

*"Till I come, give attention to reading,
to exhortation, to doctrine.
Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.
Continue in them, for in doing this you
will save both yourself
and those who hear you."*

1 TIMOTHY 4:13, 16

Another foundational principle of Believers Eastern Church is the priority we give to the study and teaching of God’s Word. In Acts 2:42, we see that the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”

A church can only grow and remain healthy as it devotes itself to the careful study and teaching of the Word of God, because it is through His Word that God works in our lives and changes our hearts, conforming us into the image of His Son¹. Therefore, I encourage our priests and leaders to remember the reason for our gathering together—to learn from the Lord as He instructs us *through His Word*.

One of the most serious crises in the Body of Christ today is spiritual starvation. Too many times, instead of being fed the pure Word of God, people come to church and are fed the opinions, traditions and popular views of man. Too many Christians today seek after some spiritual experience rather than the solid teaching of the Word. As a result, churches remain full of spiritual infants, people unable to grow strong and mature in their spiritual lives because priority is not given to the Word of God.

Some time ago, a clergy of an evangelical church told me how he and his wife were the only ones out of their 200-member church who did any kind of evangelism

¹Romans 8:29.

and soul winning. I was shocked when I heard this. I said to him, “you must not be feeding the believers. Maybe they are weak and sick because there is a lack of proper teaching, and that is why they are not bearing spiritual children.” I asked if he had ever opened the Scripture and showed his people how to witness for the Lord. I encouraged him to do so saying, “It’s very simple. You go to the preaching of Peter, Stephen, the Roman Road or the kingdom’s message Christ preached. Through Scripture you can show the believers simple and practical ways to share the gospel with their friends and neighbours. After you teach them, take them out for some kind of outreach and let them practice what they learned.” To my surprise, he had never even thought of doing something like that.

What a tragedy to see a fellowship in which the believers should have been strong and godly “fathers in the faith” but instead were stunted in their growth due to lack of biblical instruction. It reminds me of Hebrews 5:12— “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

The truth is, this same scenario is repeated in churches all over the world. Because of the lack of solid, biblical teaching, churchgoers still live in unforgiveness, greed and jealousy, still lying and gossiping. It is sad that after 15 or 20 years in a church with all the noise, emotion and the gifts of the Spirit, believers are still as carnal as when they first came to Christ.

This is why every clergy, every teacher and every leader must understand and take the call of God to be faithful shepherds very seriously by giving priority to and feeding

the sheep from the Word of God. I pray that every believer in Believers Eastern Church will have the same reputation as the Bereans whom we read about in Acts 17:20, who daily searched the Scripture for themselves, hungering after the Word of God.

How Powerful

Why is it so important to give priority to God's Word? The reason is because it's God's means to change and transform our lives. The Word of God is the only book in the world whose words are alive and able to penetrate the heart of man. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."²

Today, some of the most powerful telescopes reveal millions of galaxies that are out there, millions of light years away; these galaxies are so immense that we will never even see a glimpse of their light in our lifetime. Their light is still traveling to the earth—how vast and far away they are! Can you imagine the immensity of space and all the stars? Now think about the rest of creation. How did God do it, creating the stars and the heavens and all that the universe contains? The Bible says, "Then God *said*, 'Let there be light'; and there was light"³ (emphasis mine).

The words He spoke brought something out of nothing! And His Word, which He has given us, is still "living and powerful," able to change our lives! Deuteronomy 29:29

²Hebrews 4:12 ³Genesis 1:13.

tells us, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God gave us His Word—66 books from Genesis to Revelation—and every word and syllable in it is for us and our children today!

Every problem we face now or may face in the future—whatever it may be—has its answer in the Word of God. For “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him.”⁴

God has given us everything we need for our life in His Word. All the human psychology, philosophy and positive thinking in the world will never be able to answer the situations of life like the Word of God can. The only way for people to have supernatural intervention in their lives is through the Word of God, because it is through the Word that the Holy Spirit works in our lives for He is the author of it. And the Bible says that “for you have so exalted your solemn decree that it surpasses your fame”⁵ for it is firm and eternal.⁶

We must remember that the power of the Word of God in our lives comes only through faith. Faith is the foundation of living in God’s Word. This is why I never pray for someone’s healing until I tell them Bible verses that speak about God’s promise to answer prayer and heal us. I know that no amount of counsel or positive thinking from myself is going to heal anyone. But if I explain the Word of God to them and point them to Scripture, their faith is built and God Almighty—who

⁴II Peter 1:3 ⁵Psalm 138:2 ⁶Psalm 119:89.

merely spoke words and created the whole universe⁷—does the miracle.

Where does faith come from? The Bible tells us “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”⁸ That is why God told Joshua to not let this Word “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”⁹

Times without number whenever I face spiritual battles, I always go to Scripture and speak it out loud. When I sense satanic forces coming against me, I speak out and say something like this: “In the name of Jesus, I tell you demons to leave me alone. You have no authority on my mind or my emotions. I refuse to give in to fear because it says in 2 Timothy 1:7 that the Lord has not given me a spirit of fear. Through declaring Bible verses, I say that the promises in God’s Word are for me, and they become a reality in my time of need.

We see that Jesus did the very same thing. When He was being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He overcame by declaring Scripture in His time of need.¹⁰ Repeatedly, Jesus responded to Satan saying, “It is written” and ultimately defeated Satan with the Word of God.

By learning to live in God’s Word and meditating on it, we are transformed and changed on the inside. It is like eating food. As we eat, the food goes into our stomach and the digestive process starts, pulling out the nutrients our body needs to become strong and healthy

⁷Hebrews 11:3 ⁸Romans 10:17 ⁹Joshua 1:8 ¹⁰St. Matthew 4.

and sending them all throughout our body. The same thing happens when we meditate on the Word of God. We hear it, read it and speak it, and it goes into our hearts and minds, changing us and filling us with faith, nourishing our spirits and making us strong. This is why God's Word *must* have priority in the life of every believer. Whether you are called to be a clergy, teacher, mother, father, evangelist, farmer, factory worker or taxi driver, you must learn to live in God's Word, giving it priority in your life. In so doing, you will experience the power of His Word at work in your life on a daily basis.

Responsibility of the Clergy

When we learn to live in God's Word and give it priority in our lives, we become spiritually strong. How do people learn to live in God's Word? One of the ways is in the clergy faithfully teaching and leading his parishoners in applying the Word of God learned.

In Teaching

In speaking to the Ephesian elders as a teacher of God's Word, Apostle Paul said, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God. Everything He intended for you, I did not shrink back from telling you. I held nothing back. I stayed true to declaring to you not just part of it, but the whole counsel of God"¹¹(paraphrase).

Even after 10 years of being in church, one can remain spiritual infants if they are only spoon-fed the Word of God week after week, and never taught how to

¹¹Acts 20:17-21, 27.

study God's Word for themselves. Then, when they face problems or the enemy comes against them, they run to so-called "prophets" or to their teachers to tell them what to do. Every believer must learn how to take the Word of God and use it to oppose the attacks of the enemy, knowing how to stand their ground and gain victory themselves. With this goal in mind, each priest should instruct the believers God has entrusted to him in how to live a life of victory through God's Word.

This is the purpose of the shepherd—to lead and feed the sheep so that they will mature in their walk with Christ. Some priests get so upset with their congregations, feeling they have to scold and beat the sheep, getting angry with them for not witnessing or not having godly children or not being a good role model or doing more in the church. This shepherd has forgotten that the sheep only become strong and do these types of things as they grow in God's Word. It is like scolding a bunch of starving, skinny, feeble sheep for not bearing young. The sheep simply cannot. They do not have the normal, biological development or strength needed to reproduce because the shepherd has not fed them the right food. If a man wants to be a godly, responsible clergy and see the believers in his church flourish, then he should take the responsibility to teach his parishioners very seriously.

The Bible clearly shows us that the majority of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit are all for one purpose: to *teach* and instruct the people of God, so that they will be equipped to live for Christ and spread the Gospel. Ephesians 4:11–13 tells us, "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints for the*

work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (emphasis mine).

This is the remarkable way God has chosen for His church to grow. The shepherd must realize that their responsibility is to teach God’s Word, so that no longer are they the only ones who understand how to pray or to take authority over the enemy or who understand the Word of God, but now there are hundreds of believers being disciplined and understanding the ways of the Lord.

As the believers are equipped, instead of just the priest praying for the sick and the needy, there are now 50 people doing it. Instead of just two people having the ability to teach, there are now 20 people able to teach. Instead of just one person having the gift of faith, all of a sudden, through God’s Word, God raises up 10 people with the gift of faith. Just think about the possibility! Instead of just two people active in evangelism and soul winning, now there are 100 people doing it!

This is how the church grows! Not by money, buildings, plans, computer printouts or challenging people to do something. Churches grow naturally as the clergy faithfully teach their people the Word of God. This results in believers who are committed to prayer, love, unity and studying the Word of God. And the church grows as people learn to give themselves completely to the Lord.

Using or following the lectionary: What to teach?

To assist and guide the teaching each Sunday, we have the Lectionary. A Lectionary is a listing of various

Scripture readings for Sundays and other special days of the year. The readings are selected and systematically arranged according to the church calendar and seasons, with broad themes or subjects along with sermon outlines for teaching and preaching.

The Lectionary provides us a pattern and system for reading, studying, meditating and teaching of Biblical truths. It will also help to bring order and uniformity to our church at large. Thus, it will help our whole church to learn God's Word and grow in Him.

As a priest or shepherd of a local parish, the clergy needs to start preparing for the coming weeks teaching of God's Word, well in advance. Since the scripture portions which need to be read, as well as the broad theme and outline is already mentioned in the lectionary, it makes it easier for him to focus on the relevant topic and prepare effectively.

In Application – how to teach from God's Word effectively?

Along with teaching the people how to understand what the Bible is saying, the priest is also responsible for giving practical application to put into practice what has just been taught. Without practical application, the whole reason for studying the Bible is missed. It's like casting a net and catching hundreds of fish, but never pulling the net in—all his work was for nothing. It is through practical application that a person begins to learn to live in God's Word.

In St. Matthew's Gospel 7:24–27, we are given a serious warning from the lips of Jesus: "Therefore whoever hears

these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Jesus is warning us of the implications of merely hearing the Word and never obeying it. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”¹² The priest must have both aspects—teaching the Word and bringing the necessary application to daily life so that believers can live out the Word.

Consider the automobile engine as one example. “The real value of an automobile is in the application of its engine, not in the engine itself. Today, unfortunately, in the great majority of pulpits and classrooms, we rev the engine and get excited about the sound we make, while the people in the audience wonder, ‘When are you going to drive that thing somewhere?’ We confuse the means and the end. *We get so tied up in our content that we forget the purpose of content is life change.*”¹³

D. L. Moody once said, “The Bible wasn’t given for our information, but for our transformation.”

Yet in all of this, let me give this caution: We must not just challenge people to obey what the Bible says. We must lead them to the Lord Jesus Himself, to obey Him

¹²James 1:22 ¹³Dr. Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner- Teachers Book* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1992), p. 120.

whom the Word speaks of. Simply obeying the Word without knowing the Lord leads to dead orthodoxy, as happened with the Pharisees.¹⁴ We must teach for *life change*. This comes only as we know and obey the Lord Jesus. As we see Him and know Him through the revelation of the Word, we are changed into His likeness and reveal His glory.¹⁵

In all our teaching and preaching, the goal must be to have 50 percent doctrine/theory and 50 percent application. In order to see people become what they hear, a priest's message must be, at the minimum, 30 percent application.

Four Practical Steps

I want to mention four simple and specific questions that, if used, will help a priest learn how to study God's Word and teach it to his congregation in a way that will help his people grow to be spiritually strong and healthy, established in the truth of the Word of God. For over 25 years, I have tried, tested and used these principles in my teaching and have found them to be exceptionally effective. However, these principles did not originate with me, but rather with my dear friend Dr. David Mains, who was the first person to help me understand how to teach effectively. These principles have literally revolutionized my teaching ministry and the lives of the hundreds of others I have taught this to as well.

One, what is the main theme of that Sunday teaching? If you look at the lectionary, each Sunday has a clearly laid out theme. For ex: February 25, 2018, which is the

¹⁴St. John 5:39-40 ¹⁵II Corinthians 3:18.

second Sunday of Lent, the theme is – The “Promises of God.” The theme is very broad and gives us a general idea about that week’s teaching subject. However, there are also 4 passages which will be read that Sunday – one from the Old Testament, a Psalm, one from the Epistle and the most importantly, one passage from the Gospels. These 4 passages are selected based on the general theme for that Sunday and tie in beautifully to the general theme. In fact, a short outline as to what each of these 4 passages speak about is also given in our lectionary.

All this is given so that the one who teaches has a clear idea what his subject is. Having a clear subject in mind is like a runner knowing exactly where the finish line is. If the preacher does not know what subject he is talking about, it will be difficult for the listeners to follow.

Two, what is the response being called for? (What is the priest asking the people to do?) A sermon must go beyond just information about the passage. At its best, it’s a challenge to be more Christlike. Unfortunately, more often than not, those listening aren’t sure what is expected of them. A vast majority of the sermons preached in churches don’t actually ask for a clear response. They are just information passed from the priest to the believers, and information alone will never help anyone become more like Jesus.

For example, a teaching about “Promises of God” might call for people to recalling God’s promises for them, and believing in it when situations around them are tough. So faith is the desired *response*. Remember what the passage in Romans 4:13-25 says – “Without weakening in his faith, he (Abraham) faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about

a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

Often the response being called for is right there in the text. Sometimes it’s only implied. But there must be some response called for, otherwise people will not know what to do with the message.

Three, what is the “how-to”? Most teachers give no sermon time whatsoever to addressing this issue. They assume listeners already know how to recall God’s promises, how to pray when circumstances get difficult or witness to their neighbour. The truth is that many Christians don’t—and preachers often don’t take enough time to answer the necessary “how-to” question. One reason is that the how-to is almost never in the text. It is something that the teacher has to put together, and this takes time.

If the sermon is about recalling God’s promises for them, and believing in it when situations around them are tough, the preacher should assume most believers will struggle to know practically what to do. They need a good explanation on how to build faith in the best and worst of times. Suggestions might include writing down God’s promises in a book or journal, making friends with those who demonstrate faith in their lives or memorizing verses that talk about God’s promises. Then, when things don’t seem to be going well - like Abraham, you can recall God’s promise to you and believe that God will do what He promised!

Of course, just mentioning such ideas for believing God's promises isn't enough. We have to explain what journaling, or memorizing Scripture, finding friends strong in faith, hoping against hope, involves. Each suggestion needs to be carefully spelled out in practical steps or the believers won't understand, remember or do it. For example, in the above teaching the application could be something like this: "Brothers and sisters, today, before you go to bed, make sure to memorize one promise of God from the Bible. Then take a pen and note book and write it down, the verse with reference so that you can refer to it later. During this week, go back and look at the verse again and again. Repeat it many times to yourself until you know it by heart. Next week you can learn another verse which has God's promise for you."

It's relatively easy for a preacher to quickly get into the sermon subject and the response being called for. However, it's the how-to that takes extra sermon preparation time to develop. Sadly, far too many sermons close without mention of how to do what needs to be done. The result is that believers walk out of the church service without much understanding of how to apply the great sermon the preacher just preached.

Four, what's the "how long"? What is a reasonable amount of time by which the priest can expect people to start living what is being preached or taught? This question is important because, for the most part, teachers expect people to change much faster than possible.

It is true that conversion can happen quickly once a seeker understands what's involved. But spiritual growth takes much longer than we would like to admit. Preaching one sermon on 'Promises of God' is probably not

going to make all the believers apply it that week itself. The same is true if a minister wants his people to become effective witnesses, prayer warriors, or students of the Word, or holy as God is holy. Most topics require more time for processing and putting into practice what was taught—far more time than most sermons allow.

How many Sundays will it take to get the average congregation to start exercising greater faith after the teaching about “Promises of God?” Certainly more than one Sunday! But the way preachers often preach, that’s all the time available for a passage like Romans 4: 13-25. Why? “Because,” says the minister, “next Sunday I have to move on to Ephesians 1:15-23 about effective prayer life” (another topic that’s next to impossible to cover in one Sunday if you really want what is being told to change people’s lives). Do you see how preaching through a book can possibly be counterproductive if you don’t consider the process and time it takes for people to change? This means that the minister must remind his people as a way to follow up.

D.L. Moody preached a message at a church one Sunday, and the following Sunday, at the same church, he preached the same message. And the next Sunday, he preached the same message to the same church. Finally, someone came to him after the service and asked how long he was going to preach the same message. His response was, “Until you all learn and do this, I will continue to preach the same message.” Spiritual growth simply takes time.

No Shortcuts

The only way for a priest to teach and instruct his people in a manner that equips them is to invest his time in the study of God's Word. This is the singular, most important element to a priest's ministry.

We must seek to understand God's Word as a man would seek to find hidden treasure.¹⁶ This does not mean reading a passage and then turning to concordances and commentaries to find out what it means; they should be used sparingly for clarification. Rather, a priest must feed on the Word of God and let it sink deep into his heart, taking the time to meditate on it and allowing the Lord to speak to him and change him by it. Only as he does this can he impart the Word of God to his fellowship.

How does a priest become a student of God's Word so that he may be faithful in his calling? By committing his time to the Scriptures. I hope I can encourage you with an example from my life. I am a very busy man, like many of us. But for me to be able to fulfill God's call on my life, I wake up in the early morning hours and spend a good amount of time studying the Word of God. I know that without a commitment to the Lord and being in His Word, I cannot do what He has called me to.

This is the only way to have an effective ministry. There is no shortcut. An investment of time must be made. Think about when a mother prepares a meal for her family. Does she just call everyone to come to the table, speak magic words and then all the food appears? Of course not; it would be foolish to think things happen instantly. There are time and preparation, the gathering

¹⁶Proverbs 2:4.

of different ingredients, the waiting for things to boil and cook. It's a process that takes time. Similarly, it takes time to prepare a spiritual meal to feed the people of God. From my pastoral experience, I've found it takes an average of no less than 25 hours of study in order to be able to teach one hour. This is an average of 3–4 hours per day of personal Bible study.

Good Habits for Every Believer

Even if you are not a clergy, the habit of waking early and spending time with the Lord is something vital to your spiritual life, which you can implement in your daily routine. I encourage you to fall in love with God's Word. Every day, spend an hour or two to study the Scriptures, and you will be surprised by the delight, victory and the joy you will find.

In order to have a life that is strong in the Word of God, each believer should develop the daily habits of reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on God's Word.

- **Daily reading:** Each member of Believers Eastern Church should have and follow a daily reading system in which portions of Scripture are read daily so that the whole Bible is read through within one year. In order to assist us in that, our church has developed the 'Read the Bible in 1 year' booklet.

- **Bible/Promise Cards:** I also encourage Believers Eastern Church members to copy Bible verses onto small cards, which can be carried in a pocket and read while waiting in line for the train or other places.

- ***Memorizing Scripture:*** In our Women's Fellowship as well as Sunday School, we have an emphasis on memorizing God's Word. Memorization allows you to think about the Word of God even while you are at the marketplace or on the job. It is also very beneficial to memorize Scripture as a family, encouraging each other as you grow in faith together.

Believers Eastern Church members should also carefully listen to the priest's weekly teaching with the mindset that they have the responsibility to teach what they learn to someone else—their children, spouse, neighbours or friends. Because of this, each member should bring a notebook to church and take notes on the message given so it is possible to refer back to those notes later.

Following the example of the early church, whose members devoted themselves to faithfully studying and teaching the Word of God, will result in a healthy, well-developed, growing, fruitful life and fellowship. If the shepherd faithfully feeds and tenderly cares for the sheep, the result will be sheep who produce spiritual offspring, encouraging others to walk closely with the Lord.

May God's blessing rest upon Believers Eastern Church as we commit our lives to giving priority to His Word.

6

GROWING IN LOVE AND GRACE

*“By this all will know that
you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.”*

ST. JOHN 13:35

What is the one characteristic of an authentic, genuine follower of Christ, the one trait that would so boldly stand out that the moment anyone saw it they would proclaim, “That person must be a follower of Jesus Christ!” Is it a strong conviction of fundamental doctrines? Is it to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Is it to have great success in ministry?

The answer is given by the Master Himself, the very One who redeemed and purchased us as His Bride with His very own life: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have *love for one another*”¹ (emphasis mine). Without love, doctrines are worthless. Without love, the gifts of the Holy Spirit will not benefit anyone. Without love, there is no authentic and lasting success in ministry. The Bible makes it very clear that without love, everything we do is of no value: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”²

¹St. John 13:35 ²I Corinthians 13:1-3.

For this reason, the major emphasis and guiding principle of Believers Eastern Church is to be a people filled with love and grace. Someone can have the best-looking ministry with hundreds of fellowships, become well-known in the community and be actively involved in full-time ministry, but if they do not have love, they have nothing. It's love that matters more than anything else. Perhaps that is why Jesus spent His last few hours on earth showing His disciples how to love as displayed in this scene:

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’”

Of all the ways Jesus could have spent His last few precious hours on this earth, He chose to spend it washing His disciples’ feet and showing His love for the sole purpose of leaving them an example to follow, that they might do to one another as He had done for them. It was the job of the lowest servant to wash someone else’s feet. And it was in this way that the Son of God chose to show His love for the disciples. Genuine love is a choice - a choice to serve, not only those whom we like, but those who are difficult to be loved as well.

Unfortunately, there is a perceptible lack of love in the church at large. As Paul Billheimer, in his book *Love Covers*, explains, “The most important, momentous, crucial, but the most ignored, neglected and unsolved

problem that has faced the church from its infancy to the present throbbing moment, is the problem of disunity. . . It has been Satan's master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined. Disunity in the church is the scandal of the ages. The greatest sin of the church is not lying, stealing, drunkenness, adultery, or even murder, but the sin of disunity."³

How sobering it is to realize the truth of that statement. It's quite a serious condition that the church finds itself in today. We have forgotten that above all else, the Body of Christ is to put on love because it is the bond of perfection.⁴ It is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit.⁵ The Bible says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."⁶ The Apostle John clearly reminds us that God is love. He does not send love. He is not creating or manufacturing love. God is love. So the proof of our relationship with the Father - more than anything else - is seen in the way we are able to live out His character, His nature . . . His love.

Why is it that so many in the church seem to know so little of what it means to follow Christ's example of love and laying down their lives for others? It seems that instead of esteeming others better than ourselves, forgiving and blessing those who malign or hurt us and praying for our enemies, Christianity has become a faith filled with people who are self-seeking, looking for recognition and praise from man, fighting for their rights and shifting blame.

³Paul E. Billheimer, *Love Covers: A Viable Platform for Christian Unity* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 1981) pp. 7, 31 ⁴St. John 13:12-15, 34-35; Colossians 3:14

⁵Galatians 5:22; I Corinthians 13 ⁶I John 4:16.

All too often, believers have forgotten how to rejoice in another's blessings and prosperity. Instead, they live with such pride, bitterness and jealousy that it is difficult to admit sin and failures and say, "My wife, please forgive me. I have done wrong . . . My son, please forgive me. I have done wrong. . . My brother, I have sinned against you. Please, forgive me." It is such a tragedy that so much of Christianity today knows nothing of the humility, love and brokenness of Jesus Christ as *a way of life*.

Whether we claim to be orthodox in our faith and have sound doctrines or to be Spirit-filled with all the gifts, both are absolutely worthless if love is not displayed practically, in everyday life. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, St. Paul writes an incredible thesis outlining the doctrine of redemption and the church. But the book of Romans does not end there. Apostle Paul continues by saying that because of these doctrines, we must be like this:

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," [a] says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."⁷

Sadly, there is often a dichotomy in believers' lives making it hard to know the difference anymore between real and superficial Christianity. Imagine what would happen if a church knew what it meant to live an authentic life of love. Just think of the impact that church

⁷Romans 12:9–21.

would have on its community and nation!

Because the believers of the early church lived in such authentic love, they impacted the great ancient city of Rome. The Romans were known for torturing and killing hundreds of thousands of believers in Christ. It is said that when Roman officials sent out spies to check out this new group of people, later referred to as Christians, they came back reporting to their superiors: "Behold! How they love one another!"

What did these spies see among the believers that caused them to return with that response? What they witnessed was the reality of agape love - God's unconditional and unselfish love - among the believers.

"Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away."⁸

Years ago I had the privilege to serve the Lord in the state of Punjab and lead several evangelistic teams. One day while we were out on our ministry, a young man came up to me and said, "I hear what you are saying and I believe in Jesus Christ. I'd like to know more. Can I stay with your team so that I can learn more about Him?" That very same day, the man received a Bible, came to

⁸ I Corinthians 13:4-8.

our base and became part of the team. He joined us each morning for prayer and Bible study and sometimes even went with us on outreach. The whole team was thrilled to have this new brother and excited at the opportunity of making him a disciple and helping him grow in the Lord.

Then one day he came and told us that he was leaving and would not be coming back to see us anymore. We were all disappointed because we really thought he might join us full time.

But what shocked us even more was the badge he pulled out of his pocket. He had been sent by a reputed agency to watch our activities. He explained how he was assigned to study us and see what we were all about. The interesting thing is that he behaved perfectly, like he really wanted to be a part of us, but his real motive was to learn as much as he could about us and report it to the authorities.

I'll never forget his words before leaving the team. He said, "You know, I really wish I could stay with you people. You are some of the best people I have ever met in my life. The way you live together, work together, love each other and serve one another is unbelievable. I've never seen this anywhere. Usually people are always fighting amongst themselves. There is such love here. And I wish I could stay here but I have a job to do. You are good people. Please continue to do this as long as you want." And with that, he left us.

I wonder what kind of reaction an unbeliever would have if they lived with believers today. The sad truth is that they would probably say that their own unbelieving people were much more kind and understanding.

The world is not looking for doctrines. Christ never preached doctrine. His greatest sermon⁹ is not a doctrinal dissertation; it's all about being the light and salt of this world, forgiving and not judging others, letting go of bitterness and loving one another. The world is not waiting to hear a set of rules on what is right or wrong. The world is looking for a genuine demonstration of love - something that is real and that they can hold onto and believe - to experience the love of Christ, through us. We must remember the words of Jesus: "All will know that you are My disciples, *if you have love for one another*"¹⁰(emphasis mine).

Loving one another means helping, caring, forgiving, letting go of bitterness, allowing room for others' faults and failures, and welcoming the one who backslides and repents, with open arms. These are the characteristics of Believers Eastern Church. It is an inside-out reality, a way of life. Christ's love must first sink into your own heart and revolutionize the way you think and feel and see your fellow man. This transformation will cause the love of Christ to flow out of you, becoming contagious to those around you.

My prayer is that those who do not know Christ would be able to walk into any Believers Eastern Church and experience the overwhelming love of Christ among the believers there. May the infinite love of the Lord burn our hearts to their depths so that we cannot help but love others.

This love by which we must be known, needs to be lived out practically, day by day. "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."¹¹ In the next

⁹ St. Matthew 5-7 ¹⁰St. John 13:35 ¹¹I John 3:18, NIV.

sections, we will highlight the specific ways by which our love can be lived out in everyday life.

Forgiveness

If genuine love is present in a believer's life, then forgiveness will abound. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, one of the things included in that lesson was forgiveness: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. . . For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."¹² Jesus connects God's forgiveness with our willingness to forgive those who wrong us.

Do your prayers reflect the forgiveness of Christ? Oftentimes when we pray for ourselves and our own struggles, our prayers are filled with words like, "O God, have mercy upon me! You know how weak I am. Please show me grace." But when we pray about the person who has failed or wronged us, our prayers are much different. We pray, "O God, judge him. Show him how wrong he is. Make him sick. Lord, You know how bad and how mean he is. Lord, You know!" We probably don't say those exact words, but that's what is in our hearts. We want justice to be brought our way.

But when we fail we don't say, "God, bring your righteous judgment upon me! Let your wrath fall on my life." No way! It's always, "Lord, You know how weak I am. Please, O Lord, have mercy on me." But we don't want to think about others that way.

¹²St. Matthew 6:12, 14-15.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew 18, Jesus narrates the parable of a man who owed a lot of money to his master.

Going by today's calculations, the amount the man owed came to around ₹200 crores; that's some 30–50 million U.S. dollars. The man went to the master and pleaded for mercy, "Please sir! Please, I beg you, don't put me in jail! Don't take my wife and kids away! Please, have mercy on me!" The master forgave him his incredible debt, and the man walked away rejoicing, totally free of the burden of the great amount he owed.

As he walked back home, rejoicing because of the remarkable mercy he had found in his master, he met a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. That amount was about a 100 days' wages, a sum most men of the day could have paid if given enough time. But when the forgiven servant saw the man who owed him, he demanded that the fellow pay him back the money immediately.

The man begged for mercy, saying, "Please! Please! I will pay you back, but please give me time. Have mercy on me!" But no mercy was given. In fact, we are told that the forgiven servant grabbed the man by the neck and began to choke him. According to Roman law, if a man owed money and refused to pay it back, his debtor could twist his neck until the blood ran from his nostrils. Evidently, the forgiven servant was doing just that.

When the master heard about this, he was outraged. He called the forgiven servant in to see him.

"You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed." And Jesus

said, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”¹³

The forgiveness the servant received was revoked, and his debt was put back on his account!

This parable shows us how seriously God expects us to show mercy and forgiveness to our fellow man. Jesus has forgiven us so much and He expects us to do the same for the people in our lives.

Forgiveness is such a serious issue in society today. So many people live under the judgment of God, with torment and fear because of unforgiveness in their hearts. So many people are plagued by broken relationships in their lives. Even though they may smile and say everything is wonderful, their minds are restless and there is no peace in their homes or relationships because of unforgiveness.

Simon Wiesenthal is a famous Jewish writer who wrote a remarkable short story in 1976 titled *The Sunflower*. In an autobiographical account of an experience he had 30 years before, while a prisoner in one of Hitler’s concentration camps, Wiesenthal tells of the day when he was on work detail, turning a barn into a field hospital. While he was working, a young German nurse hesitantly approached him and asked, “Are you a Jew?” He answered her, and she motioned for him to follow her. She led him into a dark, musty room where one wounded German soldier lay dying. The man’s whole face was covered with bandages, except for openings cut out for his nose, ears and mouth. The dying soldier began to tell Wiesenthal how his Nazi troop herded 300 Jews into a gasoline-soaked house and

¹³St. Matthew 18:35, NIV.

then fired grenades at it. Now dying, the soldier could not get the images of burning bodies and the screams of his victims out of his mind. He was tormented by his past and sought forgiveness. Wiesenthal said nothing, but only listened. The soldier, reaching out for Wiesenthal with his nearly lifeless hand, concluded with these words:

“I am left here with my guilt. In the last hours of my life you are with me. I do not know who you are, I know only that you are a Jew and that is enough. I know that what I have told you is terrible. In the long nights while I have been waiting for death, time and time again I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him. . . I know what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace.”

Simon Wiesenthal . . . felt the immense crushing burden of his race bear down on him. He stared out the window at the sunlit courtyard. He looked at the eyeless heap of bandages lying on the bed. He watched a bluebottle fly buzzing around the dying man’s body, attracted by the smell. “At last I made up my mind,” Wiesenthal writes, “and without a word I left the room.”¹⁴

Later in his life, Wiesenthal asked 32 different people, from all different walks of life, what he should have done. Out of the 32 people who answered him, 26 said that he did the right thing in jerking his hand away from the dying man and walking away without forgiving him. One person even commented that the young German soldier should go straight to hell for what he had done. Even a Christian writer confessed, “I think I would strangle him in his bed.”¹⁵

¹⁴Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), pp. 109–111 ¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 112.

Consider another example and see the difference. I had the privilege once of meeting Corrie ten Boom, a believer who survived Hitler's concentration camps. She told the story of how she and her sister, Betsy, were hauled up into a large shower room by cruel Nazi soldiers and stripped naked. One particular soldier stood there, making fun of them as the water fell on their freezing-cold, naked bodies.

Sadly, Betsy died in that concentration camp, but by the grace of God, Corrie survived. Years later, Corrie ten Boom, now known worldwide for her awesome testimony and forgiveness she showed to the Nazi movement, was speaking in a meeting in Munich, Germany. After the meeting was over, a man came up to her and stretched out his hand, saying, "Ah, how wonderful it is to be forgiven." As Corrie looked up to greet the man, a feeling of hatred crept over her as she recognized him. It was the same soldier who had made fun of her and Betsy while they were tortured in the concentration camp.

For a moment she froze and could not speak a word. But in a split second she remembered all the times she had said, "Forever I forgive Hitler and his soldiers." Now her forgiveness was being put to the test. In that moment she struggled to find forgiveness in her heart for this soldier. But in her mind, as an act of the will, she said, "I acknowledged once again: 'O Lord, I am not able, only by Your grace.'" And she stretched out her hand, took his and said, "Yes, it is wonderful to be forgiven."

My brothers and sisters, that is love.

How many fellowships do you know in which people take time to go out of their way and seek forgiveness of one another? How many people do you know of, who, even if they have not done wrong, sense something may be wrong. Such people will go and make sure that everything is right. How many churches do you know of that believe in forgiveness?

How I pray that each of us would choose to love even when it is difficult to do so. It's even more difficult to show that love through sincere forgiveness to the one who might have wronged us. Just as Christ's mercy and forgiveness have changed our lives, our communities and nations will change when we choose to extend the same mercy and forgiveness the Lord has showed us.

Valuing Others

When our hearts are filled with God's love, we will no longer see people as ordinary, but will recognize them as people individually made by God, and thus, value and respect every individual. A beautiful example of this is found in the story of the woman caught in adultery.¹⁶ The self-righteous religious leaders of the day made her stand before Jesus and everyone else and screamed that the Law demanded she be stoned to death for her sin. Jesus knew the Law, and He knew her sin. But He handled the situation with love and grace, valuing the dignity of the woman before her accusers and extending to her His great love and forgiveness.

Jesus did the same with Judas. Even though he was a thief and a betrayer, Christ loved him until the end. He

¹⁶St. John 8:1-11

maintained the dignity of the man. He never exposed or humiliated Judas for all the wrong things he was doing. Jesus still loved him, and even after Judas betrayed Him, He still called him friend.¹⁷

People are only too eager to listen to rumors and the faults of others. It's like a hunter going after his prey, swelling with pride over his bravado and eagerly waiting to tell the rest of the world all about his "courage." The question we must ask ourselves is whether we would want others to do to us what we do unto them. We need to remind ourselves to treat others the way we would want to be treated,¹⁸ remembering that "love will cover a multitude of sins."¹⁹

This means not judging, condemning or rejecting one another, but in love and grace bearing with one another. We must learn not to be affected by major or minor issues. The Moravians had their wisdom concerning this: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. And in all things, love." Romans 14 must become our guide for how we are to value, honour and give dignity to one another.

There are so many non-essentials we pick up and hold high, and by doing so we hurt one another, having no understanding of God. It is so easy to see the speck of dust in our brother's eye, while the whole time we have a huge beam in our own.²⁰ If we truly know the Lord, we will reflect His love instead of turning our focus on the faults of others.

As a young boy growing up in my village, I once heard the story of a young girl who went to worship at the local

¹⁷St. Matthew 26:47-50 ¹⁸St. Luke 6:31 ¹⁹I Peter 4:8 ²⁰St. Matthew 7:1-15.

church. She had just come back to Kerala from North India where she had been working. On that particular Sunday morning, she wore a salwar and a khameez, a ring and a tiny gold chain while going in for worship. The elders of the fellowship said they could not allow her to partake of the Lord's Table because she was dressed in a most worldly style. These leaders thought that those who wore pants and jewelry were condemned to hell, and, they included this young girl in their judgment. What an irony! Salwars are today accepted as one of the most modest forms of dress in Kerala.

This disease of being judgmental is a serious sickness among believers at large. How I pray that we be known as a people who live above this foolishness. Let there be no partiality between believers for any reason - may all be safe among us, all accepted and all loved.

Grace for Failure

If our love is real, it will be reflected in our attitude and response toward those who fail. Our attitude toward failure must be different from the world's and from what might be seen in other churches.

We can learn how to handle failure through an example found in the New Testament. There was a fellow in the Corinthian Church who did some really bad things, and the church leaders didn't think much about it. When Apostle Paul heard about the situation and how it wasn't being addressed, he became upset, saying, "I can't believe this! How can you people tolerate this?"

You let this go on right in front of your eyes!? This

man must be punished! You should be ashamed of yourselves for not dealing with this!”²¹

The church got St. Paul’s message loud and clear and went so far as to kick the man out of the fellowship as an act of discipline. The poor fellow was so sad, walking around weeping all the time, crying and repenting, wanting so much to be a part of the church again. So he repented, made things right and decided to return to the fellowship. But the priest and the elders said, “What are you doing here? There is no place for you in this church. We don’t want wicked sinners like you. We only allow saints like us here.”

When Apostle Paul heard about the man’s repentance he rejoiced. But when he heard how the elders had treated him, he was upset once more. Please understand what I am saying.

The first time Apostle Paul rebuked the leaders for condoning the man’s sin. He did not say, “You must kick that man out of the church forever!” He didn’t say that. He said, “You should be ashamed for not addressing this important matter in the right way.”²²

Then, when the leaders were unwilling to forgive the man who had failed yet repented, St. Paul pleaded with them, saying, “Please, we must not be ignorant of Satan’s devices.”²³ He was trying to warn them that by not extending love and grace to the man they were giving Satan a foothold in their church.

We need to be careful to address situations within the church that do not line up with biblical standards, while at the same time always walking in love and grace.

²¹I Corinthians 5:1-2 ²²I Corinthians 6:1-3 ²³II Corinthians 2:5-11.

Consider this example. There was a woman working in one of our offices in South India some years ago who was a strong believer. She got married to a man who went to a Spirit-filled church that did not believe in using medicines or doctors. When she was expecting her first baby, there were some complications because the baby was in breech (turned sideways in the womb). In order to save both the mother and the child, she had to be rushed to the hospital so that the doctors could do an emergency C-section. By the grace of God, both lives were spared, and the couple now has a beautiful child.

But when the woman returned to the church with her little baby in her arms, the leader rebuked her in front of everyone, saying, "Our sister has come back to the fellowship, but for the next six months she is forbidden to say a testimony or partake of the Lord's Table because she went to hospital. She trusted doctors instead of the Lord."

This same church is very particular about its people tithing. So I asked her if she had still been tithing, even though banned from the Lord's Table, and she replied in the affirmative. I said, "So, you cannot partake of the Lord's Table or say a word of testimony, but they still want your money!"

My brothers and sisters, this should not be so. Although the Bible instructs us to trust the Lord to be our Healer, He can use doctors and medicines to bring about that healing. If we err, let us err on the side of grace, not legalism.

No one is perfect. Even the great Apostle Paul said, "For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not

justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.”²⁴ It is by grace and mercy that our huge debt is wiped out, being saved from sin, guilt and eternity in hell! To add to that great privilege, God continues giving us blessings after blessings. There are so many of them that we could list them for eternity -forgiveness, mercy, grace, spouse, children, ministry, and on and on. The list never ends!

If the Lord is so gracious to us, how come we find it so difficult to forgive someone who fell into sin? Why do we all of a sudden become self-righteous Pharisees, looking all spiritual on the outside, but rotting inside because the love of God cannot dwell in our judgmental hearts? What hypocrisy!

The church is not a five-star hotel with all the luxuries! It is a hospital for the sick, the blind, the lame and the crippled. We must see God as the Great Physician, the Restorer and the One who leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one that strayed. He is the patient, loving Father who waits for the repentant prodigal son to come home, never asking a question about anything he did but simply receiving with open arms his lost one, restoring his life.

We need to remember that God is the Master Potter. When the clay is broken, messed up or ruined, He takes it and reshapes it, making a beautiful vessel out of it. He is the One who never breaks off the bruised reed or snuffs out the smoldering wick.²⁵ He fans it into a flame. Isn't that what you and I would want for ourselves? How we must also desire this for one another.

Instead of breaking off that bruised reed among us, let us fan into flame the small spark of life that remains with encouragement, love and prayer.

²⁴I Corinthians 4:4 ²⁵St. Matthew 12:20.

Showing Compassion to the Suffering

Finally, when there is genuine love in the church, there will be compassion shown toward the suffering and the needy.

How I wish we understood the compassion of Christ more! In the Gospel of St. John 11, Christ is seen weeping over the pain of the two sisters whose brother Lazarus had just died. St. John 11:35 tells us that “Jesus wept.” The shortest verse in the Bible speaks the loudest. Why? Because it shows Jesus’ humanity. It reveals that He understands me. It shows He cries and that He understands my feelings and has compassion toward me. It tells me that when I weep, He does not mock me, but weeps with me. It demonstrates what a compassionate and loving Saviour He is.

Just think about it. Jesus did not just sit in heaven and send a bunch of angels to rescue us from the misery of our sin. Rather, “the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us.”²⁶ Jesus came to earth and lived among us, becoming flesh so that He could feel and understand what we go through, to touch us and let us reach out and touch Him, to weep with us and feel our pain.

My brothers and sisters, we must do the same. We will never be able to influence the world if we stand outside the camp, outside the poverty, the disease-filled communities, the colonies of leprosy-afflicted, the slums, the street children, the blind, the poor, the rejected and the downtrodden. Jesus clearly told us: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world”²⁷ (paraphrase). We, like Jesus, must be willing to go and

²⁶St. John 1:14 ²⁷St. John 17:18..

live among the needy and hurting and show them God's love.

Mother Teresa of Kolkota, was inspired to launch the sisters order known as the Missionaries of Charity, so that they would visibly portray serving the poor and the dying and for that she chose the dress code of the street sweepers. This is where after years of watching the impact of their sharing Christ's love and mercy, we, at the Believers Eastern Church decided to launch our Sisters Order - the Sisters of Compassion.

These sisters would be handpicked for their commitment to serve the poor and the needy. They would then be given special training at the end of which, we pray for them and commission them to their calling – to serve among the marginalized, the neglected, the unwanted and those not cared for. At the time of penning these words, we have more than 500 sisters serving in the slums, in leprosy-afflicted colonies and among street children and widows. Recently, while visiting the slums of Mumbai, I was amazed to see some of our sisters who have been living and working there in those very slums for the past 3 years! And even more amazingly, they want to continue serving there itself! Can you imagine that – living in the worst possible conditions, but doing it all for the love of Christ?

The love of Christ compels them to go and reach out to those people, becoming a part of their lives and loving them by their willingness to share in their suffering and anguish. Like Jesus, they are available to touch them and be touched by them if we are to fulfill the call of Christ in demonstrating His love and compassion.

Christ's compassion always moved Him to action. It was not just feelings. St. Mark's Gospel 1:41 shows Jesus, moved with compassion, stretching out His hand and touching one deformed by leprosy. It was out of His love and compassion that He fed the hungry, embraced the weary, forgave the sinner and healed the sick. This is the same call He has given us - to carry His love to those around us.

A couple of years ago, the Bishop of the Archdiocese of Delhi shared a nugget of information with me. He said that there were over 100000 homeless people on the streets of Delhi. Half of these were estimated to be children, most of them abandoned, not knowing where or who their parents were. When he shared his burden with me, I asked him to pray about it and see what could be done about this social malaise. Now we have Asha Grih, our Children's home in Delhi; one for boys and one for girls, where more than a 100 children are cared for. When I hear about the sad stories of some of these children (you can read more stories in the book *No Longer A Slumdog*/website etc.), I am heartbroken, because there are many more like these on the streets. But I'm also glad we can at least take care of some of them. I thank God for the privilege we have been given to show God's compassion. The church exists today with the command from the Lord to care for widows and orphans. We must extend the love and compassion of Christ to those hurting all around us who desperately need to know Jesus' love.

The Bandigi story

Some years ago, again one of our bishops called me in the early morning hours and told me a disturbing piece

of news which had appeared in a national daily. The news was about a 'shishubazaar' - a market for selling children! As unbelievable as it may seem, the story was true and the mothers were 'selling' their children because they had no means financially to bring their children up. One mother said that, even if she didn't get any money for her child, she would be happy since she would be sure that her child would get at least three square meals. Can you imagine the mother's agony? Can you put yourself in that situation - where you are forced to sell your own children or see them starve?

In response our missionaries and priests went there and confirmed the story. Within the next 2 weeks, we were able to start our Bridge of Hope project there to help save these children. This is just one of the many sad stories that are brought to our notice every day. There are many more and you can read the story on our website and our BOH site. In response to the needs in South Asia, our church has been able to help and support more than 74000 children in our Bridge of Hope project (www.bridgeofhope.in).

This is why I say each church needs to be looking for practical ways to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the suffering humanity in its neighbourhood and nearby communities. A definite plan of action should be made as to how believers can actively reflect the love and compassion of Christ. Some practical suggestions are being witnessed in nearby colonies for leprosy patients. If there is a slum in the area, church members can find ways to care for the needs of the slum-dwellers, perhaps by helping start a medical clinic or literacy

program. If there are 50-60 Believers Eastern Churches in a district, they can all come together and make a plan for starting a home for street children, taking them in and giving them hope and a future. What an incredible opportunity to teach the ways of God to these children and keep them from dying on the streets!

Since the time I wrote this, we have started work in leprosy colonies in 12 states of India and we have even a Hospital which caters to their needs in the state of West Bengal, India.

When the church lives in this kind of love, the community, the country and even the world is impacted.

Recently, I read about one of our brothers on the mission field who, by God's grace, started a small congregation in his village. But this did not come without a lot of persecution. There was one particular man in the community who continually opposed him, always attacking, criticizing and making life very difficult for our brother.

One day, the man was travelling by jeep when he met with an accident and was seriously injured. He had a fracture in one of his legs . Unable to walk, he lay in his hut all alone without any form of help whatsoever. None of his friends came to him, and he had no money to pay for the treatment he so badly needed.

When our brother heard about the man's condition, he wanted to help him. He went around with some of the believers in the village and they collected money so that they could take the man to hospital for the right treatment. The money was collected, but there was still one problem. The nearest junction to hire a jeep to the

hospital was a 10-km walk away. So the believers carried the man in their arms all the way to the junction, went with him to the hospital and paid his bills. Because of their compassion, the man was treated and healed.

When the man got back to the village, he said, “I cannot resist the love of your Christ that I have seen in you. I want to be a Christian.” Hallelujah! That is authentic Christianity - the love of Christ made real through compassion. The man became a believer and was baptised!

There are thousands of ways we can be actively involved in extending the love and compassion of Christ. But whatever form that may take, I pray that each of us will choose to live by the example that Jesus gave us, remembering that “all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”²⁸ May God continue to lead us forward with the determination, the commitment and the will to go against our selfishness and reach out to love others.

If we follow the example of grace and love Jesus left for us, each person we meet will be touched by the love of Jesus as it flows from our lives. May God give us the grace to live out His love each day and bless every single person we meet.

²⁸St. John 13:35.

7

COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

*“Continue earnestly in prayer,
being vigilant in it
with thanksgiving.”*

COLOSSIANS 4:2

Another guiding principle of Believers Eastern Church is our serious commitment to prayer. The church was started through prayer, and it must continue in prayer. We don't want to start depending on human methods to see the church built, for the Scripture tells us: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD."¹

I still remember a deep burden that weighed down my heart over 35 years ago. The Lord was calling my wife and me to give our lives totally for the sake of reaching out to the millions of people in Asia who had never heard the gospel. This conviction led us to prayer and we waited upon the Lord. We spent days in prayer, not knowing what else to do.

One Tuesday night, we called some of our friends and together we sat around the maps of India, Nepal, China and other Asian nations and spent the evening in prayer. Week after week, we continued to meet and seek the Lord, asking Him to go before us and show us what He wanted us to do. It was out of those prayer meetings that the seeds were sown for fulfilling the Great Commission in our lives. And to this day, around the world, wherever our ministry is found, those Tuesday night prayer meetings continue, not because we believe that it's a tradition that needs to go on, but because we continually need to hear

¹Jeremiah 17:5.

from God and lean on Him for support. And this can be done only through prayer. You can learn more about this from my booklet, 'Learning to Pray.'

Right from the very beginning, we saw God working so many incredible miracles as we prayed and sought after Him. Our faith grew stronger and stronger as we saw the faithfulness, care and love with which He heard and answered our prayers. He is real! Call upon Him, turn to Him in prayer and you will see Him work.

Some years ago, I happened to hear about one of our brothers on the mission field who was immensely successful in his ministry. Hundreds of people received salvation and were added to the church, and in a short time five churches were established through this one brother. Curious to learn the pattern of his work and service, I called the regional leader where this brother was serving and asked him to find out more about the brother.

A few weeks later, the regional leader called and said: "He hails from a tribal background and has hardly any clothes or money. During the course of his study at our Bible College, he started the habit of waking very early each morning to pray, spending two hours alone and on his knees before the Lord. We don't know much about what gifts or abilities he has. All we know is that every single day he spends three or four hours in prayer and another hour studying and meditating on God's Word as well. Then he goes about his ministry and the Lord works through him."

This story is not unique to this brother alone. I have heard hundreds of stories like this, wherein some brother or sister goes to the mission field and soon hundreds of

people are touched by God's love and a church is born. In each case it is the same: Someone is on his or her knees, someone is praying, someone is fasting, someone is seeking God's face. And the Lord is there with them, leading them.

I am absolutely convinced that everything done for God must be started, continued and sustained by prayer. Prayer is the medium through which God has chosen His kingdom to be established on earth, through His Body, the church. God works through the prayers of His people. A church that does not emphasize the power of prayer will miss out on the power of God working through them. As a matter of fact, a church that does not have a serious commitment to prayer will eventually die and become nothing more than a self-sustaining social gathering.

It's only as we come to God in prayer that we show our dependence on Him and receive His limitless power to carry out His will on earth. Zechariah 4:6 tells us that it is "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty." When we pray, our lives and all what we are, are submitted and surrendered to the possibilities and will of God. Prayer is how God has chosen for His Body to partner with Him in the work of the kingdom. We see His kingdom being built only as we pray and stand in our place as co-labourers with God.²

If we follow the Lord, depending on Him through prayer, we can be sure we will see God move. He will always do what is best for His kingdom. Our time frame may not be His time frame, but He will always complete His work.

²1 Corinthians 3:9.

Examples from the Early Church

Take a walk through the Book of Acts, and you will clearly see the early church's commitment to prayer. From the start we read: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication"³ and "devoted themselves to prayer."⁴ "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."⁵

In Acts 7:59 we read about the stoning of Stephen. After giving one of the most powerful sermons ever recorded in the Bible, the Pharisees, outraged by Stephen's message, came against him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. All through this ordeal, Stephen *prayed* to God. Imagine praying while being killed!

In Acts 4:8, 14, we see the church *praying* and laying hands on people for them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 9:11, Saul is in *prayer* after his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. In Acts 9:40, apostle Peter *prays* and a dead woman is raised to life.

Supernatural strength. Supernatural grace: God worked through them in such powerful ways. Why? Because they were men and women who prayed! The early church didn't have any influence in the government or special connections to make things happen for them. They had something far better, the best connection in the universe - connection with the living God Himself!

When I went to the seminary, one of my classes was a study on the Book of Acts. I will never forget this class.

³Acts 1:14 ⁴Acts 2: 42, NIV ⁵Acts 4:31.

We had learned so much about the background and context of this book that by the time we finished it, Acts had become merely history to me. It was all about who wrote what, who didn't, it was complete with history and geography.

Never once did I hear my professor say: "This book is given to us to live by. These things happened for our sake, for us to learn from and follow the examples. Here we see a disabled man getting up and about! Here we see the sick and lame made well! Here we see demon-possessed people set free! Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Book of Acts never ends with a full stop. It is a continuation. This is the pattern for the church today. This is what the church is supposed to be like." I never once heard anything like this!

But this is what the church is supposed to be like! The book of Acts is the model for Believers Eastern church today. The life and power of the early church came through believers' prayers! Acts 2:42 says they were *devoted* to it. To be devoted means "to give up one's time and energy to a particular purpose or activity."⁶ They were given to this one thing - prayer. Everything flowed out of their life of prayer. Perhaps that is why prayer is mentioned nearly 100 times throughout the Book of Acts, in all sorts of situations. Whether in good times or bad, persecution or praise, the believers of the early church were devoted to prayer! And because of this they saw miracles take place and thousands turn to Christ, and they were given the grace to endure some of the worst persecution the church has ever known.

⁶Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition (Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2001).

Just as incredible things happen when the people of God devote themselves to prayer, when believers stop praying, that connection is lost. When we stop praying and depending upon God, we are left with only our own strength and flesh to get things done. And this simply will never bring about the purpose of God. This is one of the reasons why we see the growth of the church stunted in many places around the world. So, many churches have become more like organizations, with systems and policies to tell them what to do, rather than receive God's guidance that comes only through prayer. What started out as a thriving move of God gradually began functioning more like a machine, simply going through the motions of worship. This system will eventually grind to a standstill. Without prayer, things become stale and unfruitful. Where there is no prayer, spiritual life runs dry.

This is why I tell our priests and missionaries that even if they do nothing else, it's imperative that they gather together for prayer. If prayer is neglected, all will be lost. S.D.Gordon once said: "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. . . You can do more than pray *after* you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray *until* you have prayed. Prayer is striking the winning blow . . . service is gathering up the results."⁷

Prayer was the reason behind the growth and vitality of the early church. Out of the believers' prayers we see that "And the Lord added to the church[a] daily those who were being saved."⁸ The Lord builds the church. It is His doing, just as Jesus said, "I will build My church."⁹

⁷Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 1975), p. 51. ⁸Acts 2:47 ⁹St. Matthew 16:18.

I must tell you, there is nothing in the world that frees you and gives you peace more than this understanding: “God called me. God started this work. It is His ministry. I don’t have to strive. He will do it. I must remain faithful to what the Lord told me to do.”

As we stay devoted to prayer, we will more clearly understand the reality of God working through us to accomplish His will on this earth. When people wonder what the secret to the fruitfulness and growth of Believers Eastern Church is, let it be known that here is a group of weak, helpless believers who totally depend on God, praying and seeking His will in all things. In this, Christ will receive all the glory and honour, and we will see His kingdom built.

Principle of Prayer

Why is prayer so important? If God is Almighty and self-sufficient, why does He need our prayers? We are just weak and frail humans! We know our limitations. He is the One who created the whole universe! Why would He need us? Why did He devise prayer as the way to accomplish His will on earth?

Over and over again throughout the Scripture, we see God moving in response to His people’s prayers. Though He knows the situations and the needs of His people before they even manifest, He moves only in response to prayer.

An example of this is found in Ezekiel 22:30–31: “gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the

fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD.”

In this verse, it sounds like the Almighty God is helpless when believers don't pray. But this is not so. Rather, God has chosen for us to be partners with Him in establishing His kingdom on this earth. The Creator of the whole universe, the Ultimate Judge, the All-powerful One made it so that His will is accomplished when we pray. God's plan on earth is regulated, controlled and accomplished by His people standing in the gap. We read an excellent explanation of this in Paul E. Billheimer's book *Destined for the Throne*:

[Prayer] is like a safety-deposit box in the bank vault. The keeper has a key and you have a key. Neither key alone will open the box. But, when you give the keeper your key, she inserts *both* keys and the door flies open, making available all the treasures stored in the box. *Heaven holds the key by which decisions governing earthly affairs are made but we hold the key by which those decisions are implemented.* This being so, then prayer takes on a very different dimension from the conventional notion of understanding. *Prayer is not overcoming reluctance in God.* It is not persuading Him to do something He is unwilling to do. It is “binding upon earth” that which already has been bound in heaven (St. Matthew 16:19 *Amplified*). *It is implementing His decision. It is enforcing His will upon earth.*¹⁰

Here is the principle: *God's people must pray before God will rise up to work.* It is not that God cannot work, but

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

that He chooses to wait for us to seek Him. God's nature does not allow Him to force anything upon anyone. His will is accomplished through the prayers of His people. Prayer is the act of His church working together with Him, uniting us with the will of God. This arrangement is God's choosing, and it is a great mystery.

The main business of the church is prayer. John Wesley once said, "God will do nothing but in answer to prayer."¹¹

In Genesis 18, we see a glimpse of this truth. God was ready to destroy the whole city of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the loose morals of the people there, but Abraham prayed for the Lord not to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Because of Abraham's prayers, God relented and spared Lot's family from the destruction of Sodom. What would have happened if Abraham had not prayed?

The reality that God has chosen us—weak, failing humans—to partner with Him in His work is a great mystery. And it is a privilege. I pray that each of us would enter into a life of committed prayer and thus experience the wonder of God working in and through our lives.

The Habit of Prayer

The Apostle Paul exhorts us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;¹² and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."¹³

¹¹Ibid., p. 51 ¹²Philippians 4:6 ¹³Philippians 4:7.

Are you concerned about certain members of your family who do not know the Lord? Do you worry as to how you will take care of the needs of your family? My brothers and sisters, there are a thousand things we can be concerned and worried about. But the Bible very clearly tells us to *pray* about every situation in our lives.

This is what Jesus did as well, being our example of a life of prayer. In the Gospel of St. Matthew 9:36, we read that when Jesus “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary[a] and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” His heart hurt as He looked upon the crowds of people. In this moment of distress, what was our Lord’s response? He told His disciples: “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”¹⁴ (emphasis mine).

It is interesting to see that Jesus’ first response to the hurting millions and the need He saw around Him was prayer. Our response too must be the same. James 5:16 (NIV) tells us that “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

The church must rise up and fill the gap for one another, their communities and even their enemies.

Pray Together

Praying together with other believers has special significance. Jesus said: “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

¹⁴St. Matthew 9:37-38.

“Again I say[a] to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”¹⁵

Reflect on the promise of that verse! When believers join together in prayer, God works miracles and wonders to complete the work of His kingdom.

Because of this, I exhort believers to join in prayer for one another. When a brother or a sister shares a difficult situation he or she is facing, be sure to take the opportunity to pray at that very moment. It is so easy to say: “I will pray for you,” and then walk away and forget all about it. Why not pray right away when the situation is still fresh in your mind? Often when a phone conversation is almost over, I tell the person I am speaking with: “Let us pray before we go.” Then I place in our prayer all that we talked about.

When believers join together in prayer, incredible things happen. For example, some years ago, I was crying out to God with my brothers and sisters to have His Word spread and known among people who did not know Him. I remember praying one night and asking the Lord what we were to do. I then heard the Lord speaking to my heart: “Why don’t you print Bibles?”

Feeling led by the Holy Spirit, we started praying and asking God to help us print Bibles. What happened next was amazing! Before we could even tell anyone about the whole thing, someone sent a large amount of money to the ministry saying: “Please use this for Bibles.” Today,

¹⁵St. Matthew 18:18-20.

we are able to distribute tens of thousands of scriptures every month! The Lord has been faithful in answering our prayers.

Jesus said: “Ask, and it will be given to you.”¹⁶ And the Scripture reminds us: “You do not have, because you do not ask.”¹⁷ There is power when believers join together in prayer.

Pray for Others

If we were to analyze our prayer, we would realize that most often our prayers are meant only for us. Think about it for just a moment. In the past 24 hours, what were the things you prayed for and thought about?

In everything, we are called to follow in the footsteps of our Master. Therefore, we must base our life of prayer on the example of Christ. He prayed for Peter. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed for us! Right now, He is making intercession on our behalf.¹⁸ Jesus never sought anything for Himself. His life was all about the needs of others and their struggles.

There is power when we put aside all of our own worries and cares and pray for the needs of others. When Job stopped worrying about his own problems and began praying for his friends, God blessed him with twice as much as he had before.¹⁹ James says we pray but we never see our prayers answered because we pray only for our gain.²⁰

When we become unselfish and get concerned about others, we become more like Jesus. Jesus came not to be

¹⁶St. Matthew 7:7 ¹⁷James 4:2, NIV ¹⁸Hebrews 7:25 ¹⁹Job 42:10 ²⁰James 4:3.

served, but to serve.²¹ He came not to pray for His own survival, security and future, but for others. This is the nature of Christ.

Not only are we to pray for others and for those whom we love, but we should also pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. Here is a heart-searching question: Have you ever taken a day off to fast and pray for that one person you don't like or that one individual who is giving you a lot of trouble? Have you ever prayed for your priest instead of criticizing him or his message? We must learn to pray for each other and see things from God's point of view, being slow to criticize and quick to pray.

So often believers don't realize the burden their shepherd carries. The devil attacks him and his family, his feelings of inadequacy, physical problems, lack of time and discouragement due to a lack of results. Everyone expects him and his family to be perfect and to do everything for everybody. It is so much easier to criticize the priest instead of praying and fasting for him. But we need to pray, saying: "Lord, please bless our priest, his wife and children. Lord, watch over them and protect them. Give him Your anointing, Your grace, Your words to speak." Pray for the clergy every day.

Atmosphere of Prayer

Prayer must not be viewed as just a solution to the problems of life. It cannot be reserved for special occasions or when needs are great. We are told to

²¹St. Mark 10:45.

“pray without ceasing.”²² Prayer must be the very atmosphere of our lives, covering each moment of our day.

In the book of Nehemiah 1, we find Nehemiah learning about the broken walls in Jerusalem. He is crying, fasting and praying, seeking God’s face and guidance as to how to go about the work in Jerusalem. All throughout his work of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah would stop and pray asking God: “Lord, what must we do?” The wall was rebuilt in a constant atmosphere of prayer.

I long to see every member of Believers Eastern Church walk in an attitude of prayer. I pray that everyone, every woman, man and child will walk each day in communion with God through prayer. How I pray that the ministry and teaching of each priest and missionary would originate out of prayer, seeking God’s face and guidance for what He would want to say to His church. A person can be the best Bible teacher in the world, but the teaching can still be dead and lifeless if the words shared are not saturated in prayer. the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.²³

Even Jesus, the Creator of the universe and the Son of God, needed to live His life in an atmosphere of prayer. He came to earth as a man, being our example and demonstrating how we should live. He healed the sick, cleansed the leper and preached the kingdom; and all night long, He prayed. He prayed before choosing His disciples. He prayed before feeding the multitude of 5000. Even as He faced the cross, He knelt before God and prayed. He is our guiding spirit.

²²I Thessalonians 5:17 ²³II Corinthians 3:6.

But what has happened to the church today? What has happened to the Christian community? When we face opposition, we would picket, protest and write newspaper articles instead of agonizing in prayer like Jesus did. Yes, there is a time to stand up and defend our faith like Dietrich Bonhoeffer did in the time of Hitler. But prayer seems to have been forgotten or has become the last resort. Let us follow the example of the early church and Jesus Christ who immediately turned to the Lord in prayer when faced with difficulties.²⁴

Jesus made it clear, “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.”²⁵ He says: “You are My representative. You now take My place in this world.” The Head is at the right hand of the Father, but we, the Body, are on earth. What a serious thought in Scripture when we consider our responsibility to our generation.

This is why it is necessary for us to be committed in prayer, for it is the only way for God’s kingdom to come on this earth. Read what St. John Chrysostom said about prayer: “The potency of prayer hath subdued the strength of fire; it hath bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest, extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the gates of heaven, assuaged diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt.”²⁶

Imagine the impact you could make on your home, your village, your nation with simple prayers to an Almighty God! I want to mention some practical ways with which we can integrate prayer into our daily lives. The

²⁴Acts 7: 59; 12:5 ²⁵St. John 20:21 ²⁶E.M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 91.

possibilities are endless; these are just a few suggestions. Pray and ask the Lord to show you ways by which you can stay in an atmosphere of prayer all through your day.

One: Every family should set apart a time for prayer every day, where all members gather together and pray for various concerns.

Two: Write down the names of 10 unsaved friends or relatives and pray daily for their salvation.

Three: Hang up a world map in your home and pray for the different countries of the world and its people.

Four: Whenever the radio or TV reports unrest in certain communities or countries, consider those reports as prayer requests and take a few minutes to pray.

Five: As a parish, set aside a day each week to fast and pray, opening the church for those who are available to gather together and pray from morning until noon.

Six: During worship service, set aside 10 minutes to intercede for special prayer requests.

Seven: Become a part of organizing a prayer chain for Believers Eastern Church at a regional, state or national level.

Eight: As the senior priest decide and conduct areawide all-night prayer meetings.

Nine: As a priest, make sure that the seasons of fasting and prayer, especially Lent, are taken in all seriousness.

Ten: As a priest or lay leader of the church, remember to pray for the sick in our families and communities by anointing them with oil. Prayer by faith will heal them.

Eleven: As communities and in our offices, let us follow the hours of prayer, where we stop all our activities and pray for what we have done till now, what we shall strive to do and seek God's blessings on them.

It needs to be repeated once again that prayer is the main business of the church! It must permeate every bit of our lives, our preaching and our witnessing, surrounding every step of every moment of every day in an atmosphere of prayer. Then, and only then, will we be a people God can and will use for His glory. E.M. Bounds once wrote: "God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil. The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on His great work upon earth. God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer."

My brothers and sisters, it is true, prayer is a mighty force that God has made available to His children. Consider what Paul E. Billheimer wrote in his book *Destined for the Throne*:

Checks used by some business firms require the signatures of two individuals to make them valid. One signature is not enough. Both parties must sign. This illustrates God's method of operating through the prayers and faith of His people. His promises are His checks signed in His own blood. His part was fully completed at Calvary. But no promise is made good until a redeemed man enters the throne room of the universe,

and by prayer and faith, writes his name beside God's. Then, and not until then, are the check's resources released.²⁷

. . . Prayer makes possible God's accomplishing what He wants and what He cannot do without. The content of all true prayer originates in the heart of God. So it is He who inspires the prayer in the heart of man, and the answer to every God-inspired petition is already prepared before the prayer is uttered. When we are convinced of this, then faith for the answer is easy . . . far easier than it would be otherwise.²⁸

May God help us to be a generation on our knees so that we may know Him and make Him known.

²⁷Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne*, p. 51., ²⁸Ibid., pp. 51–52.

8

BEING HIS WITNESSES

*“Follow Me,
and I will make you fishers of men.”*

ST. MATTHEW 4:19

*“Go therefore and make
disciples of all the nations...”*

ST. MATTHEW 28:19

*“... and you shall be witnesses
to Me in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth.”*

ACTS 1:8B

One of the most clear and visible marks of a church is a people deeply committed to spreading the love of Christ without shame or fear. To see an example of this, we must go back to the pure river mentioned in Chapter 1 and see how the early church lived. We must draw our example from those who were there at the beginning and see how they responded to the hurting world around them.

From the very start, it appears that the life of the early church revolved around people who were yet to know of the saving grace of Jesus and obey the command Jesus gave them: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”¹ “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”² This is exactly what the believers of the early church did. Left and right, wherever they went, they lived as witnesses to the salvation, life and power of Jesus Christ.

In both times of trouble and ease, the early holy church was marked by a sincere passion and boldness to proclaim salvation through Christ. We see this truth in Acts 4, when Apostles Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin to give an account of how a crippled man got healed. They confidently answered: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ that this man stands before you completely

¹St. Mark 16:15 ²Acts 1:8.

healed. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”³

And when, in the midst of opposition and persecution they were threatened not to utter the name of Jesus Christ anymore, the believers prayed and cried out to God to show them what to do. As a result of their prayers, God gave them even greater boldness and courage, and they continued to preach the Gospel.⁴

The boldness given by the Holy Spirit was not for entertainment. It was given to preach the gospel with power and conviction. We see that is exactly what they did, risking their very lives to see Jesus proclaimed in every nation and among every people.

The Christians of the early church made it their one goal and aim to know Jesus and make Him known. From the first chapter to the last, the whole Book of Acts is the incredible story of the early church taking the gospel to the entire world! We see this in Acts 2, when apostle Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and over 3000 people turned to Christ. As these Christians lived and grew in their faith and witness, “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”⁵ (emphasis mine). When we are faithful to share the gospel, the Lord is faithful to do great work through us.

Later, in Acts 3, St. Peter and St. John walked to the temple together and saw a man who had been a cripple from birth. As they witnessed to him, apostle Peter took the man by the hand and told him to walk in the name of Jesus. Immediately the man stood up and walked,

³Acts 4:7-13 ⁴Acts 4: 29-31 ⁵Acts 2:47.

completely healed. When people heard about this miracle, the apostles preached to them as well, saying: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”⁶ As a result, “many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”⁷

Acts 5 shows the church continuing in the power and boldness of the Holy Spirit. And because of that, we are told, “believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. . . Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”⁸

In Acts 7, Stephen, a deacon, was called to take care of the practical matters of the church so that the apostles could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Stephen used his service as an opportunity for evangelism, even laying down his life for the gospel. Then, a great persecution arose against the church, and all the believers were scattered. But even so, “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”⁹

In Acts 8 we see the gospel spreading into Samaria, Ethiopia and Damascus, with even Saul, the greatest opponent of the gospel, turning to salvation through Christ. “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”¹⁰

From its infancy, the early church was totally committed to proclaiming Jesus Christ. In just a short time, it became responsible for reproducing itself around the whole known world.

⁶Acts 3:19 ⁷Acts 4:4 ⁸Acts 5:14, 42 ⁹Acts 8:4 ¹⁰Acts 9:31.

Remember Jesus' prayer when He saw the multitudes of helpless and discouraged people? He was moved with compassion, for the people were like sheep without a shepherd to lead them. In response to this need, Jesus told His disciples to pray to God to call people to go and witness to the needy and desperate.¹¹

If the church today truly embraces the truth that every believer is called to share the love of Christ, imagine the millions of people who would come to find hope in our Lord. When travelling in a bus, working in the office, standing in line or shopping at the marketplace — preaching and sharing the gospel as a daily activity and way of life — imagine what the results would be! All it requires is a willing and obedient heart. But the saddest thing today is that most Christians do not have this burning passion to share the gospel. Many often think that evangelism is the job of the priest or evangelist. But that is not true. The Holy Spirit is given to each of us, to help us witness each day to those we come in contact with.

A few years ago I heard the story of a simple man, who in his lifetime shared the good news with more than a hundred thousand people by giving out gospel tracts on the street. I was deeply impacted by that story. The story is included in the appendix of our book. Every believer can share the gospel simply by handing out a gospel tract or giving someone a Scripture portion. If a believer truly desires to witness, the Lord will certainly provide the opportunity.

How I pray that everyone in Believers Eastern Church

¹¹St. Matthew 9:38.

would embrace witnessing as a way of life, that every individual, little child, wife, husband, old man, old woman, grandparent, sick person in the hospital, preacher, evangelist or brand-new Christian—everyone—will have the deep-rooted passion to know Jesus Christ intimately and to share about Him each day and in every situation. Jesus died for our sins, was buried and then raised to life, granting us life, peace and salvation from sin and hell. May the love of Christ be like a fire trapped in our bones which we cannot but help share with those around us.¹²

We are not on this earth to enjoy the pleasures of this temporary life. We are here to share God's message of hope for those who don't know Him. This world is not our home; we are only passing through.¹³ If our only purpose for being saved is to go to heaven and be with the Lord forever, then why didn't God just take us up to heaven the moment we received salvation? God left us here for a purpose—to know Him, and in knowing Him, make Him known to the whole world around us.

The Characteristics of the Early Church's Evangelism

The holy church is built on the apostle's doctrines and patterns we find in the record of the ancient church which is described in the historical Book of Acts. The ancient orthodox church fathers saw the Book of Acts not as a doctrinal book, but as the blue print for building the holy church. So whatever we read in the Book of Acts is for us to follow as we are the continuation of the ancient orthodox faith and practice of the church.

When we look through the Book of Acts, we see that

¹²Jeremiah 20:9 ¹³I Peter 2:11.

there are five characteristics that marked the evangelism of the early church. These are the same characteristics that must mark our lives as well if we are to impact our generation for the sake of the gospel.

The Command to go

The first characteristic is that the believers of the early church actively and passionately obeyed the Lord Jesus' command to "Go!"¹⁴ As a collective body, the church had this one, absolute, laser-beam focus: to pursue and bring hope to people in need by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of their teaching, worship and praying resulted in this one thing.

They did not just sit and wait for those in need to come to their door, saying: "Well, if some needy people would come to our church and ask for our prayers because they've got some problem like cancer, or they can't conceive, then we will pray for them, and if we have time, we will witness to them." Christ clearly told us to go out and search in the highways and byways and compel the people to come in so that they might escape the damnation of hell.¹⁵

Every believer must have the command of Christ to "Go!" imprinted on their hearts, so that whenever they are in the marketplace or standing in line, the moment will be seized as an opportunity to share the good news and give out a tract. If you ride the bus to work or school each morning, you could carry gospel tracts with you and give one to the conductor or a few people around you. Some may reject it, but that doesn't matter; keep

¹⁴St. Matthew 28:19-20 ¹⁵St. Luke 14: 21-23.

doing it. While you are waiting in line at the train station to buy your ticket, use that time to witness. Sometimes the wait in line can be almost a half hour before you get to the ticket counter. What if in that time you gave out 10 tracts or talked to a few people about the Lord? Just imagine the impact you could have in someone's life!

If we say we follow Jesus, then let us do what Jesus did— “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”¹⁶ Evangelism must be our way of life.

Message of Salvation

The second characteristic of the early church was that the believers went out to *preach the gospel*, for it alone had, and still has, the power to save.

They put their confidence in the message of the gospel. Today, however, it seems that almost all churches look out for the newest technologies and strategies to get things done, rather than turn to the simple gospel message.

We must do whatever we can to show the love of Christ to the suffering millions around us. Building an orphanage is beneficial; fighting for the liberation of the oppressed and downtrodden is good; feeding the hungry and caring for the needy are vital. But on their own, these are not enough. The Great Commission of our Lord demands that we tell the world about His death on the cross and the resurrection and the invitation to be reconciled to God.

¹⁶St. Luke 19:10.

Hell is not a holiday land. It is a place of eternal torment. Its worms will never die; its fire will never be quenched. It is a place of absolute, utter darkness, a bottomless pit where man will be condemned to live forever if he dies without Jesus Christ. Jesus provided a way of escape from this through His sacrificial death on the cross. There is no other way. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”¹⁷ That is why we must go out with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Miracles That Lead to Salvation

The third characteristic of the early church was the miracles that took place when believers preached the gospel. It was evident that the Lord was working with them, confirming the Word through signs and wonders.

Consider this modern-day example. Once, a group of believers in one of the North Indian states was sharing God’s love by distributing tracts and gospel booklets. Then, a man came up to them and received one of the booklets they were handing out. This man was in his late 50s, afflicted with cancer. When he met the evangelistic team, he, in his hopelessness and despair, was on his way to another town where he thought he would take his life. He did not want to end his life in his hometown and thereby bring disgrace to his family.

As he walked the road to his destination, he read the booklet he had received. The gospel spoke so deeply to his heart that right there on the street he broke down crying out to God for mercy. The Lord was gracious to

¹⁷Acts 4:12.

him and forgave him all his sins. A strange warmth came upon the man as he felt God touch him and heal him of his cancer.

Instead of committing suicide, he turned back to his home and went to the doctors to see if the cancer was still there.

The doctor was so sure that the man's cancer had fatally spread throughout his body that he refused to give him a check-up once again. But he insisted. After running all the tests once more, the doctor came back and said: "There's no trace of cancer in your body! What did you do?!"

The man pulled out the gospel booklet from his pocket and said: "Doctor, this is the magic! This is what healed me!"

Using the address printed on the back of the gospel booklet, the man went to them and told the brothers there what had happened to him. They explained to the man that the Jesus he had read about in the booklet was alive and that He was the One who had healed him of his cancer. He began to cry and said: "Now I know this Jesus is my God.

I'm the chieftain of my village. Would you please come and share the magic of this Jesus with all the people in my village?"

A couple of brothers went with him and shared the love and grace of Jesus in the man's village. Today, there is a parish in that village with over a few hundred people living for Christ.

How did all that happen? It took just one miracle, one touch of God. The man read the Word and he saw that

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, not only to forgive sins but also to heal. As a result of this one man's transformation, many came to Christ. He became the reason for establishing a parish in his community. This is the way God works— confirming His love through miracles.

There are some who say miracles, healings, and signs and wonders—the dead being raised and the blind getting their sight back —are all things of the past and don't happen today. But that is just not true. Is Jesus alive? If He's alive, He's the same yesterday, today and forever! And He is still doing what He did in the Gospels! The problem is not with God. The problem is in our unbelief. Did you know that, as believers filled with the Holy Spirit, as we walk on the streets and in the marketplace, demons run in fear? Often we are kept in the dark, not knowing the power, anointing and grace the Lord has given us. Let us embrace the simplicity and childlike faith of the believers of the early church and see miracles working in our lives, everybody's lives!

If you are looking for a sign to authenticate a New Testament church, go back and read the Scripture. When the believers were sick, they did not first talk about medical doctors and psychiatrists. They cried out to God to heal them. This is something we need to embrace today, not just in theory but also in practice! Start praying for people, and you will be amazed at what God will do. For example, there is a priest I know whose life has been instrumental in bringing hope and healing to the lives of hundreds of people and all of that started through the supernatural healing of a woman who was paralysed for

three years. It was her healing that paved the way for the first parish in that area.

Picture this scene: A Christian woman is working in an office and her colleague next to her says: “I have such a bad headache.” And the Christian asks, “May I pray for you in Jesus’ name?” She then opens the New Testament from her bag, reads a verse and says, “Believe in Jesus and He will help you as I pray for you.” Then she places her hands on the woman’s shoulders and prays for her in Jesus’ name and draws the sign of the cross, and instantly she is healed.¹⁸ The woman is shocked at what’s happened. She comes back the next day and says how she used to have those headaches every day, but they are gone now. And after a month, she says there are no more headaches.

The Christian explains to her: “You know what? Jesus is alive and not only heals, but forgives sin too. Why don’t you call upon Him? You need greater healing for your soul. You can be born again. You can have the purpose in your life that you’ve been looking for. You can go to heaven.”

It is so simple! All we need to do is ask the Lord for some courage and an opportunity! If the Lord provides an opportunity for you to share the gospel with someone, will He not also provide the right words for you to say?

As the believers in the early church shared the gospel, God confirmed His Word through miracles. As they shared the Word, signs and wonders, healings, and miracles followed.

¹⁸St. Mark 6:13.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit

The fourth characteristic of the early church was the believers' total approach to evangelism. Everything done was the work of the Holy Spirit, not a work of human manipulation.

Inherent to all human beings is the fact that they embrace faith in God knowingly and with the traditions they have. We acknowledge that it will be a violation of human rights to force anyone to change his or her faith. It must remain their freedom. God made man with the freedom to choose. Thank God that in most of the countries religious freedom is granted by the constitution.

While they cared for the poor and the needy and shared the love of Christ, the believers never violated that fundamental freedom by using any form of manipulation. Faith is a personal choice of the heart people must make. It is a matter of the heart. We believe that it is wrong to force or manipulate people to come to Christ. Jesus never did this. The early church never did this. We must never do this.

Our example of evangelism comes from the early church—they preached the Word, prayed for the sick and trusted the Lord to bring in the fruits of their effort. We can rest assured in the promise of God that Jesus is the One who builds His church, not us.¹⁹ We must be faithful to do the part that He has called us to do and that's all that needs to be done.

If every church followed the simple pattern seen in the Book of Acts, we would have peace in our communities.

¹⁹St. Matthew 16:18.

We are not out to force anyone to change. We are simply following the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to every person. God has given everyone a free will. It is up to each individual to choose to accept the message of the gospel or reject it.

Suffering for the Gospel

The fifth characteristic was the persecution the early church faced for preaching the gospel. The believers' lives were marked by suffering for the sake of the gospel, and they counted it a privilege, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."²⁰

Many of our own Believers Eastern Church members suffer persecution daily for the sake of the gospel. An example can be cited from one of our parishes in one of the South Asian countries. There were 25 believers who had to leave their village, giving up their property, their belongings and everything they had. Why? Because they were given the choice to either deny Christ and return to their earlier faith or remain Christians and leave the community... and they chose Christ. One sister's husband left her when she turned to Christ. But none of these things moved them; they continued to stand firm and suffer for the sake of the gospel.

When we are passionate and faithful in witnessing, it is a guarantee that there will be persecution, problems and suffering. Be prepared to give your life for the gospel. Heaven is a much better place than earth is. Even Jesus warned us: "If this is what they did to Me, you will have

²⁰Acts 5:41.

the same and even worse.”²¹ I would encourage all of you to read the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 9 and 10 as often as you can.

Why doesn't the church witness? The reason is because it does not want to suffer. It does not want to pay the price. As persecution increases, we will continue to see erosion, denial and falling away within the church. But those who endure and stand firm until the end, living in the knowledge that they are destined not for this temporary world, but to reign with Christ for eternity, will receive the crown of life.²²

Can we accept this fact? Can we teach this to our congregations and families, saying that heaven is a much better place and hence it would be wiser to not hold on to this life? If we witness for the Lord, we will face persecution, we may lose our homes, land, jobs—even our lives—but we cannot keep our mouths shut! Be bold to witness, my brother! Be bold to witness, my sister! We must be prepared to give our lives and not be afraid to suffer for the gospel.

When we follow the example of the early church in these five areas, our lives will impact thousands of people, bringing many to the knowledge of the living God.

Why Must We Be Involved in the Great Commission?

As we look to the Bible, we see from the life of Jesus and the early church many reasons why we must be actively involved in evangelism today.

²¹St. Luke 23:31 ²²Revelation 2:10.

Jesus Is Our Model

In all things, Jesus is our example of how we are to live on this earth for the glory of God. The reason why we follow evangelism is because that is what Jesus did. Jesus is our model, and so whatever He did, we too must do. We follow in the footsteps of our Lord who came “to seek and to save that which was lost.”²³

All throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus set an example for those who followed Him. When the disciples saw Jesus praying, they requested, “Lord, teach us to pray.”²⁴ Why? Because they saw His example and wanted to follow Him. When the time came for ministry, Jesus divided them in twos and said: “Go, preach, saying, ‘And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.’”²⁵ They had seen Him do these things, and now it was their turn to follow His example. Jesus was training them on the job.

In St. John’s Gospel 4, we find Jesus and the disciples tired and hungry after a long morning of ministry. The disciples travelled into town to buy some food, while Jesus waited beside a well until they returned. While waiting there, a woman from Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus took the opportunity to minister to her.

Please understand. All day long Jesus had taught the people and healed the sick, while all night long He had stayed up in prayer. Now He was hungry and tired. What do we do when we are tired and worn out? We go to sleep! We get something to drink and eat. But what did

²³St. Luke 19:10 ²⁴St. Luke 11:1 ²⁵St. Matthew 10:7-8.

Jesus do? He forgot Himself and His own needs, and He ministered to the Samaritan woman.

When the disciples came back to Him, they gave Him food. But He refused to have anything. The disciples were confused and thought someone may have already offered Him food while they were gone.

To help them understand, Jesus explained: “No one has offered Me food. If you want to know what I am talking about, look at this one woman, living in sin and not knowing the Father’s love. My encounter with her showed Me the harvest out there, the masses of people just like her. I see one woman, but one is not one. This woman represents millions just like her who are going to spend an eternity in hell! The spiritual need of the people is greater than My physical need for food. This is My food—to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”²⁶ (paraphrase).

By this Jesus was training His disciples to see people not just as ordinary living beings, but as people greatly valued in the sight of God—men and women He desires to have them as a part of His family. The disciples saw His example, His passion and His intensity to even reach out to just one person.

Why must we do evangelism? Because it is what Jesus did, the very reason He came to this earth. We follow His example.

²⁶St. John 4:34-35.

People's Eternity is at Stake

Oh, how I wish we really believed this to be true! If we claim to follow Christ, how can we be so numb and blind to those who will spend their eternity without ever knowing about God's love? Why do we feel no hurt or burning compassion for those who say, "I hate your Christ! I don't want to know anything about your God or the Bible!"? Why don't our hearts break for them?

What I am saying is that if you are a true Christian and have no feelings for those with broken lives, then something is terribly wrong. If you see the people all around you going into a Christless eternity and have no feeling about it, if you don't pray for them, your children don't hear about it, you don't give out gospel tracts, you don't support a missionary and you don't care, then, I say, you do not truly know the Lord Jesus. His heartbeat was that not one should perish! He burned with that one desire. Please, search your heart and allow Him to "break your heart with the things that break His heart."

We cannot create godly feelings and genuine passion by our work, our fasting, our knowledge or our sacrifice. God must do this work in us. He must break our hearts. We must pray, "O Lord, baptise me with Your passion for the suffering world!" If you don't have any feelings within you for the millions of people without Christ and on their way to hell, if you have no concern for the eternity of pain and torment that those who reject Christ are destined for, please cry out to God and ask Him to give you His passion for the people in need around you!

Do you know what caused me to walk away from the trap of materialism that I fell into when I first moved to the United States? It was the conviction of the reality of

hell! Jesus is *the only way* of salvation. People are leading broken lives without Jesus! That tore my heart so much that I could not escape it nor forget it. It gripped me so much that I said: “No sacrifice that I can offer is too much to reach the needy world.”

How about you? I am not trying to take you through a guilt trip. But if you are under conviction, please repent before God right now. Confess, “Lord, I am so self-centred! My heart is so numb and cold, so spiritually dead. Lord! I have no feelings for the broken lives I see all around me. I am only concerned about my world and my own things! O Jesus, change me to become like You.”

When Jesus talked about the rich man and Lazarus in St. Luke’s Gospel 16:19–31, it was not just an illustration or a parable. It was not a fairy tale. It was a real event. A man lived with riches. A man died. A man went into flames. A man cried out saying: “One drop of water!” And the man was told: “It is not possible—there’s a gulf between us.”

He cried out again, asking for someone to be sent to his family in order to warn them of this torment. But he was refused. “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”²⁷ They had their chance.

Can you imagine? This is the fate, the sealed condition of people who die without the Lord Jesus Christ. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we care?

Why must we share the gospel? Why must every member of the church be involved in evangelism? Simply because you will not meet that passenger on the bus again. You will not meet that person on the train again. You will

²⁷St. Luke 16:31.

not stand in that line with those same people again. You will not meet that person in the marketplace again. You may never meet that fisherman who came to your house or that man who sold you vegetables ever again. It's your only chance to witness to that one, and maybe their only chance to hear the gospel. I do not say this to make you feel guilty for not witnessing. This is reality. The Lord has allowed us to come in contact with certain people and we need to make the best of every opportunity and share the Good News of Jesus' love and salvation with them.

How I pray that every member of Believers Eastern Church will have a deep passion for people just like Jesus had. And if you, my brothers and sisters, pray and ask the Lord to put this burden in your heart, I tell you, your life will be different. In the evening you can go to bed saying, "Hallelujah! Today I talked to 10 people about the Lord! Today I gave out 10 tracts, and today I prayed for this country and that country."

Everything we do and every decision we make must be done in the light of eternity. How I pray that each individual of Believers Eastern Church would have his heart burning with this one passion, doing everything possible to reach those without hope in Christ.

Our God Has Called Us

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.'"²⁸

God has called for us people to go and evangelize. He didn't just say: "I think evangelism would be a good

²⁸St. Matthew 28:18-20.

idea,” or “I suggest this to you.” Rather, He commanded us to do it. Therefore, it is deliberate disobedience when a church does not have a passionate commitment to evangelism and lead people to Christ.

Just think about the seriousness of sharing God’s love with others. I cannot fathom the depth of Christ’s pain and anguish over our apathy toward the broken world. We go to convention after convention, and once again there is no invitation for people to commit their lives to full-time ministry. Nobody gives a testimony about the broken families around us. No one talks about the large number of people whom we still have to be witnesses to. No one talks about sharing Christ’s love with the marginalised and the under privileged. Nobody talks about the hundreds of thousands of villages who need to know God’s love. I just cannot imagine how much Christ is grieved as He walks away saying: “Once again, they don’t care.”

If we truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives would be spent obeying Him by being active witnesses to His love and saving power. What an honour it is to stand in the gap and turn people away from hell! Let your love for Jesus compel you to share the Good News of salvation with others. As Isaiah the prophet prods us - “Then I heard a voice of the Lord saying, “Who shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me.”²⁹

Night is coming

Jesus said: “The night is coming when no one can work.”³⁰ Time will not continue forever. A farmer knows that there’s a time to sow and a time to reap. He knows that

²⁹Isaiah 6:8 ³⁰St. John 9:4.

the harvest does not last forever. That is why a farmer never goes on vacation during harvest. Rather, he and his family and all the help they can get spend their time gathering in as much of the harvest as they can before it's too late, for if they wait too long, the harvest will be ruined.

For this reason, Jesus, with His intense passion to heal broken lives, turned to His disciples and said: "Do you not say, There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, *for they are already white for harvest!*"³¹ (emphasis mine). The time to reach out to people with His love is now!

My brothers and sisters, we must live in the urgency of this moment. Every single day, tens of thousands of people die in India alone and plunge into eternity. No matter where you are, the harvest is now! We must work while there is still daylight, for the time will come when the harvest will pass. Time will come to an end, and all those without Christ will be eternally separated from Him, in torment forever! The prophet Jeremiah reminds us of that sad possibility - 'the harvest is past, the summer has ended and we are not saved.'³²

Giving a gospel tract, sharing our testimony and telling someone about Jesus Christ is a privilege. It is not a burden. Angels are not given the privilege to share God's love with those around us—we are. God has chosen for us—you and I—to bear His name and spread the word about His love and salvation freely offered to sinners.

³¹St. John 4:35 ³²Jeremiah 8:20.

What an honour!

Practical Ways to Share the Gospel

Now we come to a very important question: How do we practically implement the call of our Lord to share the gospel? I want to list some very practical suggestions for how each and every one of us can be involved in some form of evangelism.

One: *Be involved in personal evangelism.* This is one-on-one witnessing. Here, I recommend that you open God's Holy Word and have the person you are witnessing to read certain verses that explain the need for and the way to salvation, like for example, verses such as Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, St. John 3:16, St. John 1:12 and Revelation 3:20. After taking someone through these Scriptures, ask him if he would like to give his life to Jesus and receive Christ's free gift of salvation. If he says "yes," pray with him right there, leading him in the sinner's prayer. The simplest prayer that we can follow is 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.'

There are also many good materials available to teach you how to be effective in personal evangelism. I encourage members of Believers Eastern Church to continually learn and grow in how to share your faith through personal evangelism.

Two: *Hand out tracts and booklets.* This is probably the most significant way to share the gospel. It has been said that the reason many ideologies have spread so rapidly throughout the world is because of the massive amounts of literature distributed for their cause.

Literature evangelism is very powerful, simply because

we are handing out God's Word. In Isaiah 55:9–11, the Lord said: "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, But water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower. And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it."

All believers should carry gospel tracts and distribute them to people wherever they go. While waiting for the train or bus and while walking in the marketplace are only a few examples of the hundreds of opportunities the Lord may provide.

Three: *Hold church conventions.* All Believers Eastern Church should have yearly conventions or festivals, where the entire parish comes together for prayer and fellowship, celebrating God's love and for blessing the community. Imagine the excitement and unity a local parish will experience when the whole congregation comes together to pray and prepare to be Christ's witnesses in both word and deed!

In all of this planning, however, we must stay sober-minded, remembering the purpose for all of it. It is not so we can boast about how many meetings we have held or how many people showed up. It is not for the believers to have a good time planning an event. The parish, the priest and the elders must pray and wait upon the Lord to know His way of doing things. The content of the preaching during an evangelistic meeting must be the salvation message. It must be clear but not offensive.

There should be no screaming, shouting or mocking others, but simply sharing God's love. The songs sung, the prayer offered and everything taught must be done in a way that any listener can clearly understand the wonderful gospel message.

All of the planning for a meeting like this must be handled carefully and thoughtfully. If we do this, bringing our plans under the Lord's direction, we will communicate God's love effectively and touch the lives of the people in our communities.

Four: *Witness door-to-door.* I encourage every member of Believers Eastern Church to find the time to be involved in door-to-door witnessing. Invite a friend and go from house to house two by two, sharing the gospel and praying for people. Carry gospel literature such as tracts, booklets, New Testaments and Bibles with you so that the people to whom you witness will have something to keep.

I know of people who listen to my radio broadcasts and then they spend their own money to print little radio broadcast schedules to distribute freely whenever they go witnessing from door-to-door. This is a way to give people the opportunity to listen to the gospel and come to know the Lord through the radio broadcasts.

Five: *Engage in consistent focused prayer.* Each family should have a list of at least 10 names of people for whom they pray daily. These can be people or families they know well or just casual acquaintances. When we pray for the Lord to draw people to Himself and open their eyes to the truth of the gospel, we see hearts softened and people turning to Christ.

Six: *Invite friends to church meetings.* This is perhaps

the easiest way to introduce others to Christ. Bringing a friend to meet others in the body of believers, to hear the priest preach, to take part in a worship service—all these things can help draw a person to the Lord. Let us be active and bold in inviting friends and relatives to church with us.

Seven: *Live out the conspiracy of love.* This is extremely significant. The conspiracy of love is simply the act of the local church involving itself in the needs of the community. We see needs like what the Good Samaritan wanted and we get involved in helping the hungry with food, taking the sick to the hospital and giving clothes to those who don't have them. We cannot just stand outside the need and scream at people to get saved. We must open up our lives and step into the needs of the people around us. This is done by reaching out to and befriending the marginalized - the sick, the widowed, the orphaned the leprosy-afflicted and the poor and by giving our time and resources to serve them.

Let us remember the lesson from the parable of the sheep and the goats in St. Matthew's Gospel 25:40 in which Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me."

The church is the extension of Jesus Christ and His love and compassion toward suffering humanity. Therefore, we must involve our lives in being part of a positive change. Each Believers Eastern Church should have a goal to start some form of help ministry to show the mercy and love of Christ. Through this very real manifestation of love, our communities and our nation will be impacted with the gospel.

Eight: *Organize a children camp.* When I was a small

boy, I attended children camp and it had a tremendous impact on my life. It was there that I first memorized Bible verses, which I still remember to this day.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew 19, little children were brought to Jesus for Him to bless them. When the disciples rebuked those who had brought the children to Him, Jesus turned to the disciples and said: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”³³ Jesus welcomed the little children and cared for them, and so must we.

Every Believers Eastern Church must hold a children camp each year—a strong one that is not only fun and edifying for children, but also one that teaches them the Word of God and shows them the love of Jesus.

Nine: *Set goals.* Every Believers Eastern Church should, by faith, set a goal for the number of people they want to be witnesses to, each month or each year. The Bible tells us: “According to your faith will it be done to you.”³⁴ If the church says, “Lord, we believe we are going to communicate God’s love with 50 people this next month,” and the members work and pray toward that goal, their faith, prayer and hard work will make it a reality.

Ten: *Send radio missionaries.* There are Christian radio broadcasts in all languages today by so many groups. This is a wonderful form of ministry in which a couple of believers get together and travel from house to house encouraging people to listen to our radio broad-

³³St. Matthew 19:14 ³⁴St. Matthew 9:29.

casts, showing them where and how to tune the radio to get the programmes and informing them of the times to listen. Oftentimes, teashops and small vegetable shops play the radio during the business day. An excellent way for people to hear the gospel message is to ask the owners of these shops to play our radio programme.

This is a simple form of ministry that does not take much time yet can make a significant impact on entire families as the Word of God comes into their homes through a radio broadcast.

Eleven: *Send students to Bible school.* Jesus says that the ‘The harvest is plentiful but labourers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send our workers to the harvest field.’³⁵

Each church should pray for the Lord to call young people from its fellowship to serve Him as full-time workers. When that prayer is answered, the church needs to rally around those who have been called by the Lord and help support them financially and through prayer. A photograph can be taken and then hung at the back of the church to remind the church to pray for those it has sent out for training. Prayer can be organized for the students, and cards or gifts can be sent to encourage them while they’re in training.

What a blessing it is for that church, to hear the students who have completed their training say when they are sent to the mission field: “This brother is from our church. We sent him to Bible school, and now he is serving the Lord on the mission field of Tripura, or

³⁵St. Matthew 9:7, 38.

Bhutan, or somewhere else.” What a blessing it is to think about a church which has sent out 10 to 15 ministers to the mission field to plant churches.

See how practical it can be? It’s amazing! Just one church, actively supporting its own people, can make a significant difference in the long run.

Twelve: *Organize missions prayer meetings.* Each Believers Eastern Church should organize a core group of people who commit to regularly gather together in prayer exclusively for missions. These must be people whom God has burdened to pray for missions and the nations of the world. A world map can be used to pray for different countries of the world.

Thirteen: *Have a monthly missions awareness.* Once a month, each church should learn about a people’s group or a nation in order to create an awareness of missions and the need in the world today. Printed information can be handed out that gives an overview of the country or people’s group, population, beliefs, percentage of Christians and ways to pray. There are several great resources for this available.

It wasn’t until I was 16 that I first heard of the need to preach the gospel in North India. Not once before had I ever heard about the difficulties of sharing God’s love with those who have never heard of it. I never heard about the need in Asia or Eastern Europe. My brothers and sisters, may this not be so of Believers Eastern Church. We must be aware of the spiritual state of the nations so that we can intelligently pray for them.

That is why each church should have teaching on missions once a month, either in an evening meeting or by holding a special meeting in which believers come

together to worship God and to learn about the nations through maps, pictures and whatever other means are available. After learning about the spiritual state of these countries, prayers should be offered for the people of those nations. We should all be informed about the nations so that everyone, from the youngest child to the oldest grandparent, can start praying.

Imagine the power there is when a local church is informed and puts in prayer the things happening in the world today!

Fourteen: *Organize trips.* Churches should organize yearly trips for members of the church who are able to go (this can be in conjunction with other Believers Eastern Churches in the same district or area), trips to see the need and get the opportunity to share the love of Christ. The reason we do this is because Jesus saw the multitudes, and in seeing them, He was moved with compassion for them. In the same way, unless we have a way to feel, to touch and to see the need, we will not be able to understand and be moved with compassion to pray, give and send missionaries to reach the needy in these places.

The priest can tell his people: “This year we are going to have a missions trip. We have 10 months to pray and raise the money.” The whole church can gather together and pray about where to go—Nepal, Odisha, Assam or some other state or country—and who should go. It doesn’t matter how old or young the believers are, as long as they can travel for three or four days by train and are able to minister for a few weeks or a month.

Together the members can plan out the places to

minister, where to stay and what kind of ministry will be done. They don't necessarily need to go somewhere where they can speak the language. They could simply hand out tracts in the language of the people they meet.

The impact this will have on the body of believers will be amazing as they experience the Lord using their lives to reach souls in distant lands. The testimonies and reports they come back with will charge the whole atmosphere of the church and cultivate a greater desire to be involved in fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord.

Fifteen: *Celebrate Missions Sunday.* According to our Lectionary, we celebrate Missions Sunday once in a year. During that Sunday, we have special emphasis on the missions we do as a church. We pray for various missionaries who we have sent out; we collect an offering for this specific purpose and we also remind ourselves that telling others about Jesus is our mission in life.

Sixteen: *Have an offering box for missions.* Every member of the church should consider it a privilege to financially support missions. Having an offering box placed in one's home is a very practical way for a family to be involved in giving.

Members of the Believers Eastern in one of the countries where we have a church, set aside a handful of raw rice every day as their offering. At the end of the month, they collect the rice from all the members and it's then sold in the market. The money thus got is then used to support missionaries or to sponsor a Bible school student.

Seventeen: *Participate in the sponsorship programme.*

Members can contribute toward supporting a missionary or a student through our sponsorship program as best as they can.

The whole church or individual families can join together to support someone on the mission field or in training. The priest can say: “Brothers and sisters, we as a church are going to support these two students to be sent to the mission field. But if someone here has a burden from the Lord and you have the resources, you may want to give ₹50, ₹100, ₹200 or ₹500 a month to support a student other than these or a missionary already on the mission field.”

This is a unique opportunity for churches and individual families to be involved in the Great Commission. Believers Eastern Church’s Synod Secretariat or diocese will send a photograph, testimony and all the information about that missionary so you can pray effectively. He is your missionary; your prayers go with him, and he is working on the mission field on your behalf. Periodically, a report will be sent explaining what the missionary is doing and how to pray for him.

I pray that we will be known as a people who are sold out and committed to sharing the love of Christ with the people around us, just like the early church was known for loving God and reaching out to those who did not know the love of God. May God use each one of us to make a significant impact on this generation.

9

SHEPHERDS OF THE CHURCH

*“And no man takes this honour to himself,
but he who is called by God,
just as Aaron was.”*

HEBREWS 5:4

“**H**e Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”¹

Another guiding principle of Believers Eastern Church is the emphasis we place on the character of our priests, missionaries and leaders. The work of God suffers today not because of lack of money or education, but for the lack of authentic, God-fearing leaders in the Body of Christ.

God’s plan and method for His kingdom’s work is not accomplished through committees, programs, plans or schedules, but through men and women called by God and truly devoted to Him. “The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”²

From eternity past, God’s plan for the redemption of mankind was for His Son to die on the cross. And at the right time, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to fulfill that purpose. All throughout the ages prior to Jesus’ coming, God was orchestrating the fulfillment of His plan through people He had chosen. All throughout

¹Ephesians 4:11-13, ²E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), p. 8.

the Bible, we see this to be true. For example, to find a family line through which His Son would be born into this world, God chose a man—Abraham.

From the line of Abraham came Moses, the man chosen by God to lead the children of Israel out of the captivity of Egypt. Then from the tribes of Israel came the young shepherd boy David, whom God had chosen to rule His people. From David, God chose Joseph and Mary as the family into which the Son of God would be born on this earth.

The list would be too long to mention all the individual names of people who played a role in the fulfillment of God's plans, but one thing remains consistent in each: God *chose* them. He chose Abraham. He chose David. He chose the 12 disciples to carry the message of redemption to their world. The Apostle Paul frequently referred to himself as an apostle "*called by God*" or "*appointed by God*"—not chosen or appointed by men. Ministers in the church must be men *called by God*.

Christ is our example in this, for He did not take His calling upon Himself; rather, the Father chose Him. Hebrews 5:4–5 tells us, "And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God".

So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest." It is written in the Psalms, the prophetic Scriptures, "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.'"³

Just as those who went before us knew that they were called by God, so too must we know we have been called by God to do the ministry we are involved in, for it is

³Psalm 40:7-8.

the assurance of our calling that will keep us faithful in service when things get difficult.

We have many examples throughout the Bible of men and women who faced persecution yet continued to press on because they knew the call of God on their lives. One example is the prophet Jeremiah. Although he was thrown into jail and his life was threatened, he said he could not stop speaking on behalf of God: “His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.”⁴ It was the *call of God* burning within him that enabled him to endure difficult times.

St. Paul echoed Jeremiah when he said, “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!!”⁵ St. Paul endured many intense difficulties, but none of those things discouraged him from fulfilling the calling that God had placed upon his life.⁶

The calling of God involves a deep sense of ownership and conviction. And it often involves pain. Consider the disciples. They were beaten and firmly commanded not to speak about Jesus any longer, yet nothing could stop them from doing what their Lord *called* them to do. They went right back out preaching the Gospel, and all but one were martyred for the sake of Christ.

It is crucial for those in the ministry to know and be able to confidently say, “No man has called me. It is the Lord Jesus who has called me for His ministry. I will be faithful to that calling no matter what. I will be faithful to my Lord and to my leadership under whom the Lord has placed me.”

⁴Jeremiah 20:9 ⁵I Corinthians 9:16 ⁶II Corinthians 11:22–28; Romans 8:35–39.

My prayer for Believers Eastern Church is that the vision and plan of God for this church movement would be sustained and carried along by leaders who know that they are called by God and, because of that calling, are faithful to Him and His church at all costs, serving the people of God with the same compassion and intensity of Jesus Christ.

Character Of A Shepherd Of The Church

It is in the context of the local church that the Bride of Christ is prepared and perfected without spot or blemish for the coming of the Lord Jesus. To assist in this preparation, God appoints a man as a shepherd to lead and feed the flock. Because of this, it is of uttermost importance that his character and personal life become an example for others to follow, for this is the best way to lead.

Leading by example is exactly what Jesus did.⁷ It's what the Apostle Paul did as well.⁸ In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, St. Paul said, "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears."⁹ St. Paul does not mention a single thing about any of his accomplishments. The only thing he mentions is *the way he lived* among them. Why? To set an example for them to follow.

Some people in Christian service lead double lives. In public they may do very well, but when it comes to the things done out of the public eye, such as faithfulness to the Lord, good stewardship of money, loyalty to the church, time or relationships in their lives, the two may

⁷St. John 13:34 ⁸I Corinthians 11:1 ⁹Acts 20:18-19.

not always match. Scripture shows that ministry and personal life are not separated, for ministry is an overflow of who we are, an extension of our lives.

The call of God manifests itself as a life that is shared and given away, broken like a piece of bread and distributed to the people. It is not something we learn and articulate. It is an overflow of our lives. We see this throughout St. Paul's letter to the Romans. He first addresses himself as an apostle called according to "the gospel of God."¹⁰ Then he refers to himself as called according to "the gospel of Christ."¹¹ Finally, he says, "according to *my* gospel"¹² (emphasis mine). The gospel became an extension of his life. He took ownership of the call God had given him.

Psalm 42:7 says, "Deep calls unto deep." You can only lead people to the extent and the depth that you have walked. For example, someone can talk on prayer all he wants, but unless he himself prays, there will never be any real transformation in the lives of the people to whom he ministers.

St. Paul had this depth to his life and ministry, marking four basic characteristics of how he lived among the church at Ephesus.¹³ These are the same characteristics that leaders and priests of Believers Eastern Church are to imitate in daily life.

Humility

The word *minister* literally means "servant or slave." Having a position or responsibility from the Lord does not make a leader superior to other people. Rather, Jesus

¹⁰Romans 1:1 ¹¹Romans 1:16 ¹²Romans 2:16 ¹³Acts 20:16-22.

said, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”¹⁴

Notice Jesus did not say “the servant of important people,” or “the servant of people you like,” or “the servant of those who are very close to you,” but “the servant of *all* people.” That is our call. Leadership only makes us more of a servant, carrying responsibility along with more agony, more time consumed, more tears, more misunderstandings, more suffering and more inconvenience. It is a high call¹⁵ yet one that leads us lower and lower, to the beautiful place of humility in which Jesus served.

One of the main reasons why many ministers and others in leadership are not effective in their ministries is because they are not fulfilling the role God designed for them—the role of a servant. St. Paul kept a hold of the reality of the call to be a servant. We see this in the way he addressed himself in his letters to the churches. Although an apostle and leader in the church, greatly used by God and with immense responsibility, St. Paul still referred to himself as a servant. In some letters he addressed himself as “called to be an apostle.” But throughout the pages of each book, he also calls himself a servant, a brother, a coworker and a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He knew that leading the brethren meant being their servant.

Being in leadership never makes one person more important than another. As a matter of fact, leadership actually plunges a person to the lowest place of all. Unfortunately, when some people get a degree or some recognition, they no longer want to serve, but rather to

¹⁴St. Mark 9:35 ¹⁵I Timothy 3:1.

be served as if they are someone special. But this should not be so. A minister should be ready to sweep the church building, clear the trash, clean the toilets, pick up the chairs and then go help the poor and needy. Whatever a slave would do, that is what a priest should be willing to do.

Because of this call to leadership and humility, all leaders must look for opportunities to serve. If you see trash on the ground as you are walking around, pick it up. If someone leaves the washbasin unclean, take a minute to clean it so it won't be dirty for the next person who uses it. If a room is not clean, take the opportunity to straighten up things. Quietly be a servant. Make sure everything you do is done not to give yourself a pat on the back or to degrade the person who neglected something, but to serve your King as the humble servant He has called you to be.

A servant never waits for others to serve him. A servant works all day long out in the tiring heat, yet when the master comes in the evening, he still continues to serve. The servant does not say, "I am too tired. I am done serving for today." No. He stays up, feeds the master and serves him. Then, when he has finished, he goes to eat, rest and take care of his own needs. And even still, in all of this, he says, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do."¹⁶

I pray that each minister of Believers Eastern Church will embrace this most important aspect of leadership, that of being humble and bending low to wash the feet of the saints.¹⁷ If we collectively do this, Believers Eastern

¹⁶St. Luke 17:7-10 ¹⁷St. John 13:5.

Church will make a lasting impact on our society for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Motivated by Love for Jesus

Why do we do what we do? The motivation in our heart is a major part of our character. Someone who is genuine will be faithful and true, whether someone is watching him or not, because he is motivated internally by the love he has for Jesus.

The most powerful motivation for an individual to be faithful—faithful in the areas of time management, in work, in finances, in relationships, in studies, in visitation, in instructing people and in serving and teaching the believers—is a genuine love for Jesus Christ. It is powerful when you are motivated from the inside through love and not through recognition, approval, promotion, money or anything else.

This is what St. Paul meant when he said, “the love of Christ compels us.”¹⁸

Notice those words— “the love of Christ constraineth us.” Not “the love of Christ encourages us” or “gives us a little boost.” It *constrains*. The word picture is of an excruciating, deep force, like an oil or gas well that is sealed with a lid. The lid is tight, but the moment it is removed, all that is within comes gushing out. The love of Christ is absolutely so forceful that it is the motivating factor in a minister’s life.

Once we are motivated by love, everything changes. Sometimes I get really tired and discouraged, not knowing what to do. But the moment I sit down and think about

¹⁸II Corinthians 5:14.

what Jesus did and His call on my life, everything changes. A transformation takes place within me. It's a change that no demand placed on me by someone else could make. It's not a change that comes from someone paying me a certain amount of money if I get the job done. It's nothing like that. Ultimately, I find myself pushing through difficulties, weariness and discouragement because I realize I am doing this for Jesus. I am doing this because I love Him and not for any other reason.

Mother Teresa is a fantastic example of this. I once heard the story of an English reporter who watched her wash the wounds of a leper. Upon seeing that he said, "Mother, for a million dollars I would never do this. So then why do you do it so freely?" She answered, "I would not do this for a million dollars either. But for the love of Jesus, I do it. This leper is not anyone else. It is Jesus. I am washing, cleaning His wounds."

Do you understand? Whatever circumstances you are in, your motivation is an important factor of your character and the outcome of your service. Who you are in the ministry is determined by your actions. And your actions are determined by your attitude and what motivates you. The moment you say, "Oh, what to do? I *have* to do it. It's my job," you fail the test because you are motivated not by love, but by necessity.

I pray we will all be motivated by sincere love for Christ, willing to do whatever He asks of us simply because we love Him. Whether it be preaching, praying for the sick or doing the most menial job, I pray we would recognize it for the privilege it is, rather than a burden.

Loyalty

Why did Christ choose the 12 disciples? It was not because they were from wealthy homes. They were from the poorest of towns. Some of them didn't even know how to talk properly. Yet Jesus chose those 12 men because they were loyal men. Their loyalty was proven through the laying down of their own lives. They were happy to die for loving Christ.

Loyalty is more important than education, intelligence, ability, skill, talent, age, experience—everything. The reason it is crucial in ministry is because we are not called to work as individuals, but as a team with one goal.

When it comes to the life of a shepherd or priest, there is nothing more important than loyalty to the church and his leadership. Unfortunately, a lot of people with ability are not loyal to their church or its leadership. Loyalty is only understood in terms of submission to authority. A godly commitment for any minister or leader to make to the church is "I have renounced all my will to obey my Lord Jesus Christ by obeying by superiors." I have a whole book, one of the most important books of the church – 'Touching Godliness Through Submission', which deals in depth with this subject. I strongly recommend that all our workers read it at least once in a year and study and apply it in their life.

What is loyalty? One aspect is obedience. If I am loyal, then as long as my leaders do not ask me to do anything that is against God's Word, I will do whatever they ask without grumbling and murmuring. I will not betray my team, my church, or my leadership even if my personal reputation is on the line. Loyalty is an absolutely essential part of God's plan because the chain of command He has

set up to fulfill His plan on earth is sacred. God works through people who are called by Him for leadership. No one can be an effective team player, trusted and promoted, without being loyal.

Another aspect of loyalty is found in how one handles rumors. People can spread rumors based on anything they hear, and often it's only a small portion of what really happened. When a loyal person hears a rumour about his leader or others, he will say, "I don't know the whole story. But I know him. I love and respect him. I care about him. I will not be part of this discussion." And he thinks the best and stops the rumor there.

It does not matter whether you are serving in the ministry or in a political party or working in a factory or a company. Even if you are the most brilliant individual and generate the majority of income for your company, if you lack loyalty you will not stay in your position very long. When a leader hears that one individual is criticizing the company, leaking secrets and not being loyal, that person is finished. As a matter of fact, I would rather have someone who is not as bright or qualified but who is loyal work alongside me than someone who is a superstar and competent but not loyal.

If someone is a part of our church and is not loyal to his leaders, he will not be able to survive in the ministry, even if he is the brightest minister. God works through those who are loyal.

Freed from the Love of Money

The cultural background of some nations is not one of luxury and abundance. The people may have a survival culture and because of that, have a drive to somehow, in

some way, and as soon as possible, acquire money to buy a piece of land, build a house and accumulate material goods. But Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”¹⁹

Those in ministry must learn how to walk away from the love of money, absolutely trusting God to meet their needs and provide in every way. God will never let you down. He who called you is faithful. And He has promised to supply your every need.²⁰

When we try to use the ministry to gain riches, we walk right into the trap of the enemy. It hinders our effectiveness to serve God, and His anointing upon us is diluted and damaged to the point of destruction. This is what happened to St. Paul’s coworker Demas. He grew to love this present world and fell away from the calling of God.²¹ And not only will we destroy our own lives, but those who follow us as well.

As a safeguard to avoid this trap, I strongly encourage every priest who wants to be faithful with the calling of the Lord not to handle the finances of the local church. Another faithful servant should be appointed to handle these matters instead.

When we honour the Lord in these different areas of our lives and our ministry, He sees that our hearts are fully committed to Him. And Scripture tells us that “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart is loyal to Him.”²²

¹⁹St. Matthew 6:24 ²⁰Philippians 4:19 ²¹II Timothy 4:10 ²²II Chronicles 16:9.

Characteristics Of A Fruitful Ministry

First Corinthians 10:31 clearly tells us, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” What are the characteristics of a ministry that brings glory to God?

One, a ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”²³ The goal of the Holy Spirit is never to glorify Himself, but only to bring glory to Jesus. This is what our goal should be as well.

A priest must be keenly aware of the fact that he ministers as one called by God, to serve the people of God. His one goal should be to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. When this happens, believers will have seen Jesus Christ and His love, humility and power working through the priest. This points others to Christ, and the Holy Spirit creates a deep longing to be like Jesus. That’s what the Holy Spirit does—He creates a desire in our hearts for holiness and to glorify Jesus Christ.

But if the minister is a showman, using either his gifts or his preaching/teaching ministry to promote himself or anything other than Christ, then that ministry is not anointed by the Holy Spirit. It is very sad. Many people who have started the ministry well find themselves 5, 10, 15 years down the road no longer seriously conscious of Christ’s presence because they no longer glorify Jesus. Instead, they look to glorify themselves in the sight of man and lose their anointing.

But when we keep the focus in our ministry on Jesus and glorifying Him, our lives automatically point others

²³St. John 16:14.

to Christ. This must be the pursuit of every believer, especially those whom God has called to lead His church.

Two, a life of prayer and fasting. No one can have an authentic ministry without a consistent and sustained prayer life. Whether preparing a message, ministering to the congregation or conducting outreach ministries, everything must be bathed in prayer.

I heard a story once of an older priest who had great success in ministering to his parish. People were flocking to the church from all over. Even the mid-week prayer meeting didn't have enough space to hold everyone who came; it was so packed. The Lord was moving in a mighty way.

After some time, that priest was moved to a different location to begin ministry in a new place, and a younger priest came to fill his role. This new priest had much more ability and many more degrees than the previous priest, and he had all kinds of enthusiastic plans and ways to implement new things within the fellowship.

But as the months went by, people stopped attending the services. Week after week, fewer people showed up for the mid-week meetings and Sunday services. The move of God was slowly fading. The new priest couldn't figure out what went wrong. His messages were always good and well thoughtout, and it seemed as though he was doing everything right. He decided to visit the caretaker of the church, a man who had been there nearly his whole life. "Why are the people no longer coming to the church?" the priest asked. The caretaker started to reply, saying, "Well, when the other priest was here . . ." But the moment he said "the other priest," the young priest quickly stopped him. "Don't tell me about the other

priest,” he said. “Tell me about the people here and what I must do to get them to come to church once again.”

This same scenario continued, and every time the caretaker’s reply began, “When the other priest was here.” After numerous times of this, the young priest stopped asking and told the caretaker not to speak about it again.

After a few months, the young priest returned to the caretaker’s door. Frustrated in his ministry and unable to change things, he was now ready to hear about the other priest. The caretaker welcomed the man and said, “Well, I really cannot tell you much. I have to show you. Please come and help me.”

They went into the back room of the church, picked up a table and carried it right into the middle of the church building. Then the caretaker brought a chair, placed it in front of the table and told the young priest, “Now, priest, you please sit here.” The priest did so. “Pull the chair close to the table,” the caretaker instructed. And so the priest pulled the chair closer to the table. Then the caretaker said, “Now close your eyes and bury your face in your hands.” The priest did so. Then the caretaker told him, “Now you start weeping.”

The priest exclaimed, “What!”

“All the years the other priest was here,” explained the caretaker, “every Saturday he would come and he would put the table and chair here and he would sit for hours. Week after week, I could hear him crying out to God for this church and the people in the community. That’s all he would do. Then Sunday would come, and the place would be packed out and the people would be touched by God.”

How serious is the prayer life of a minister for his congregation! Even though the young priest had great ability and his sermons were good, they lacked the power to change people's lives. Anyone who seeks to serve God without bathing the whole ministry in prayer will find that it becomes just a bunch of nice explanations and sermons, lacking the power and life that come *only through prayer*.

Three, a life of hard work. In order for his ministry to be effective and bring glory to God, a priest needs to be a hard worker. God never blesses lazy people. Just look at Jesus. He was a very hardworking individual, and so were the disciples. As a matter of fact, some scholars believe one of the main reasons Christ chose those particular men as His disciples was because they knew how to work hard.

One of our priests knows firsthand the hard work that is required when serving God. Although there are now five strong churches planted because of his faithful labour, the road to fruitfulness was very difficult. His story is one of the saddest, yet triumphant stories you will ever hear, full of pain, loneliness and hard work.

After leaving his well-paying job, he went to serve the Lord as a missionary. Year after year he laboured, but not even one individual came to Christ. He decided he would fast and pray to God in order to see a breakthrough come. Day after day, he fasted and continued doing the ministry, and still, all of his witnessing seemed to only result in people slamming their doors shut and ignoring his message. But he stayed faithful to continue to fast and pray, walking all day long from village to village witnessing and handing out tracts. As he persisted in prayer, God

brought the needed breakthrough, and hundreds turned to Christ for salvation. Numerous churches were started in that area because of his prayer and hard work. Praise God!

Some Christian workers think selling books, distributing tracts, going door to door, walking 10, 15 or 20 kilometers, or riding a bicycle from morning until evening is not ministry. They are wrong. Without physical labour—hard work—you cannot be successful in the ministry. If a man doing a secular job makes ₹5,000 to ₹36,000 working like a slave eight hours a day to earn his living, then why wouldn't a servant of God work even harder, putting in at least eight hours a day?

When Adam was created, the first thing God gave him was work, not sitting and praying. There are a lot of people who say, "I am going to fast and pray, and God is going to add people to the church." They can fast and pray all they want, but if they don't work, the job won't be done. We must be people who will commit ourselves to God, offering our bodies as living sacrifices to see His kingdom come.

Four, soul winning. Scripture tells us that a local priest must "do the work of an evangelist."²⁴ As Timothy was a student of St. Paul, he grew to become a priest and eventually a bishop. But all throughout Timothy's life, in whatever way he served, Apostle Paul told him that he must continue to do the work of an evangelist. He must stay active in soul winning. The same is true for priest and leaders today.

If a priest is not personally involved in winning people to Christ through personal evangelism, distribution of

²⁴I Timothy 4:5.

tracts, preaching and inviting people to come to know the Lord, how can he expect the people of his church to do the same? Remember, the best way to lead is by example.

When I was a vicar of a church, every Wednesday I took one of my church members house to house, knocking on doors for two or three hours and talking to people about the Lord. A shepherd be the example; this is the way the church grows to become healthy and strong.

Five, discernment. In Acts 20 (paraphrase), St. Paul said, "I am leaving you elders, but after I leave there will be very difficult times. Wolves, false prophets and teachers will come. People will rise up from within the congregation to destroy the church." Because of these things, St. Paul was warning them to walk in wisdom and discernment. I believe discernment is one of the missing factors in the lives of many ministers and Christian leaders today. We must pray for the Lord to give us discernment all throughout our ministry, so that we will know His will and the people we serve can truly be ministered to.

The man of God must know how to walk in discernment from the Holy Spirit. This is crucial because the Lord has appointed certain leadership to watch over the congregation. We need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, so we will know what to do and how to serve and lead His people.

Six, submission to authority. God blesses a minister who submits himself to authority. So much shame and disaster are brought on the work of God through independent-minded ministers and ministries that lack godly accountability.

I know many who have lost their ministry and anointing simply because there was no accountability in their lives, no authorities to watch over them. It is very important that we come under authority. Even Jesus Christ was under authority.

He was never independent. And Scripture tells us to “submitting to one another.”²⁵

If the clergy is not currently praying with and accountable to an individual in the church, he needs to ask God to raise up a group of elders, godly men with model families, to provide accountability for his life and ministry. Prayerfully, as God gives peace, these men can be placed in the position of elder.

Seven, commitment to teaching God’s Word. A ministry that is blessed by God is a ministry that is committed to teaching God’s Word. In the Old Testament, those who followed God’s call focused on the teaching of God’s Word. They spoke on God’s behalf to His people. In the New Testament, we see the same thing. Jesus said, “Feed My sheep,”²⁶ and He made it clear that the only words of life were from the Word of God.²⁷

Therefore, a ministry should be saturated with and focused on God’s Word, not philosophy, psychology or human wisdom. The Word of God must be at the center of all we do.

Eight, leading others. Priests and leaders need to understand the great responsibility of leadership. Everything in the church depends on the leadership of the priest, because he is the one who has been given the call from the Lord. Leadership is influence, and the

²⁵Ephesians 5:21 ²⁶St. John 21:17 ²⁷St. John 6:68.

priest's life affects the people of the congregation. For this reason, each priest needs to develop his leadership skills for effective ministry. This can be done by reading books on leadership and studying the lives of servants of God in the Bible.

I also want to mention four qualities of a good minister.

The first quality of a good minister is *being a visionary*. A visionary is someone who climbs to the top of the tree, sees the direction that needs to be taken, and then helps his people get on and stay on the right path.

Ministers also must lead in *faith*. Anything God does in building His kingdom must be done by faith, not by sight. And because God has appointed the priest to lead the fellowship, he must be the first to step out in faith and pave the way for others to follow.

Each priest should be looking to God to accomplish some great things, even if it seems humanly impossible. For example, the minister can set a target and say, "By God's grace, we are going to have five churches planted in five different villages within the next 12 months." He will inspire his congregation and drive and lead them to meet that goal because he believes by faith that God can do impossible things.²⁸

No one can be an effective leader without sacrifice. Leadership demands sacrifice—sleepless nights, long hours of hard work, misunderstanding, personal money spent, people murmuring, loneliness and many other things. Read Numbers 13–15 and 2 Corinthians, passages that show how, many servants of God lived lives of sacrifice.

²⁸St. Matthew 19:26.

As a servant in God's work, I cannot stress enough how very important it is to understand there is a price to be paid in serving the Lord. It is suffering. This is the way of Jesus Christ. Suffering marked His entire life and the lives of His disciples. Scripture is clear: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."²⁹

Finally, the priest needs to be able to *lead the leadership of the church*. This is exactly what Moses did in shepherding the children of Israel. God gave the elders to him, and as he led them, they helped lead the people. The congregation never leads the congregation. It is the priest, along with the help of his elders, who leads the people. The priest must be able to impart the vision God gave him to the elders, encouraging them, challenging them and motivating them. Without this, leading the ministry becomes very difficult. A priest cannot be a one-man show; he needs the support of godly elders who will help him carry out God's will for the church.

In conclusion, being called to be a minister, shepherd or priest in the church is a great privilege and responsibility, not to be taken lightly. Ministers are chosen by God to shepherd His flock, preparing the church to be the spotless, beautiful Bride of Christ. I would also encourage you to read my book 'Against the Wind', which is based on the writings of St. Paul to Timothy.

May God continue to work in our lives to make us ministers and shepherds that truly honour Him in all things and see His kingdom come!

²⁹ 1 Peter 2:21.

10

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

“He who leads, with diligence.”

ROMANS 12:8, NKJV

*“God hath set some in the church . . .
[gifts of] governments.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:28, KJV

In order for any society or nation to function properly, there must be rules and disciplines established, along with quality leadership to implement them. The same is true for the church. That is why one of the guiding principles of Believers Eastern Church is the government that is set up to oversee this move of God.

The purpose of any good government is to ensure a peaceful environment and to establish and enforce the laws that guarantee peace and common welfare for all. Any people without rules and discipline quickly degenerate into a people of anarchy and chaos. A biblical example of this is found in the synopsis of the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”¹ Without proper rule, the people began to go astray. The result was a famine that struck the land.² This same thing happens when there is no proper and workable system of government set up for the church.

Throughout history there have been many different forms of government. From the feudal system to monarchies, dictatorships to republics, one thing remains constant in each: No matter what form, history testifies that every form of government man has devised has failed. Fallen man is incapable of governing his fellow men without greed and corruption.

¹Judges 21:25 ²Ruth 1:1.

The living God is the only One who can rule over man in perfect righteousness. Therefore, the end result of adapting any form of government for the church without God being the ultimate ruler and absolute controller will always be total chaos, confusion, rivalry and fighting for position and power.

From the Scripture, we see that the only form of government God ever endorsed and established was *theocracy*, “a government under the immediate direction and administration of God.”³

The first mention of the word *government* in the Bible is found in Isaiah 9:6–7:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

When you look at the journey of the people of Israel throughout the Bible, you’ll find that God Himself ruled over them. In every situation in which they needed guidance and direction, God spoke to them. Day by day, they saw the hand of God leading, guiding and providing for them supernaturally. In fact, the name *Israel* means “governed by God.”

Although God ultimately ruled, He made Moses the first human leader of His people. Whenever a decision

³Webster’s New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

needed to be made, Moses asked the Lord and He spoke to him, giving him the direction, guidance and laws needed to govern the people. Moses was God's chosen instrument to fulfill His plan and purpose for the children of Israel.

In order to assist Moses, 70 elders were appointed as sub-rulers so Moses did not have to make all the decisions alone. These 70 elders were given authority to rule under him. If they were unable to find a solution to the problems that arose, the elders then brought the issues to Moses, who in turn went to God for divine counsel.

Also under Moses was Aaron, the high priest and the leader of the people in spiritual matters. Various orders of the priesthood assisted Aaron, men who carried out the responsibilities of service within the tabernacle.

In the case of the nation of Israel, we clearly see that there was a governmental order installed by God. First, God chose Moses to lead His people. To assist Moses, He chose the 70 elders and Aaron. Thus we see three levels of leadership—a theocracy to govern the people. God is a God of order.⁴

Government In The New Testament

In the New Testament, we see a more revised form of government established by God. In the church, the chain of authority begins with Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the Body, the authority over all the church. Out of all the hundreds of those who followed Jesus, He chose 12 to be called apostles. It was these men who became the first

⁴Exodus 18:13-27.

leaders of the church. That is the reason we are told, “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles...”⁵ Then the apostles ordained men called by God to help take care of the spiritual well-being of the church.

Here I would like to add a paragraph from the book ‘Believers Eastern Church’

In the New Testament, there is only one specific, clear example given concerning the structure of church government. That is rule by the bishops. The Greek word for bishop is *episkopos*. This type of rule reflects how God called and appointed Moses to lead His people: one individual in leadership with leaders under him to help guide the people. Sheep never lead the sheep; it is the shepherd who leads the sheep.

It is a fact accepted by church historians that the governance of the “one, holy, apostolic and catholic church” has its beginning with the apostles of Christ who led the church at her beginning and that they not only led the way to do the Great Commission,⁶ but they were the first bishops in the church. Even before the event of Pentecost, after Judas had betrayed the Lord Jesus, St. Peter preached referring to Psalm 109:8, authenticating the bishopric of the holy church.⁷

There are those that say the office of the bishop was a later “human” invention. The fact is contrary. The apostles not only were the first bishops of the church, but wherever they went, they appointed bishops to succeed them to oversee the church in each locality. For example, St. Thomas came to India in AD 52 and established

⁵I Corinthians 12:28 ⁶St. Matthew 28:19 ⁷Psalm 109:8; Acts 1:20.

churches and appointed bishops to give leadership to the church.

Then there are others who argue the office of bishop and presbyter were originally identical. While these terms were sometimes used interchangeably in the very early stages of the church when the apostles were still alive, the office of bishop (*episkopos*) and presbyter (*presbyteros*) were distinct and separate in their function with the death of the apostles. From history, we know St. Ignatius of Antioch consecrated bishops by AD 70 in the church which sent St. Paul and St. Barnabas out for their missionary journey.⁸ After the close of the first century, bishops appointed by the apostles had great numbers of presbyters under their leadership in the church.

The authority of the bishops, presbyters and deacons were very much part of the people of God, for all believers are priests and kings in the new covenant,⁹ but these positions of leadership were appointed by God to shepherd the flock of God, called from among the people of God.¹⁰ And the people of God were commanded to obey and submit to those who ruled over them.¹¹

At the same time, we know from church history, many church leaders strayed away from the godly model and began to usurp authority for their own gain and power, which caused much damage to the church. The reformation was in reality the protest against the misuse of authority in the church by the leaders. A godly model for a bishop or any other church leader is found in the teaching of Christ in St. John 13 and St. Paul's speech in Acts 20,

⁸Acts 13 ⁹Revelation 1:6; 5-10 ¹⁰Ephesians 4 ¹¹Hebrews 13:17.

where St. Paul speaks to the leaders of the church in Ephesus in his farewell speech to them (Refer to the book 'Becoming an Episcopa').

The abuse of power by some leaders caused some to question the biblical model of leadership, but the problem was not in the model we find in the Bible and early centuries of the orthodox faith, but in the deviation from it.

The faith, worship and holy traditions of the holy church at the close of the first thousand years had basically remained the same from place to place. The church everywhere confessed one creed, believed in Trinitarian worship and adhered to the infallibility of the Word of God. They gathered on Sunday to meet God and worship Him as one people and went out to be the living witnesses of Christ through their sacramental life. They were led by bishops, priests and deacon fathers.

In Believers Eastern Church, we follow the governance of the holy church that is both biblically and historically established: *episkopas*, priests and deacon fathers¹² to lead the church.

Faith of the Church

Thousands of independent groups lead by charismatic men and musicians and even many denominations claim to be churches. But looking at it, from biblical and historical point of view, one to have the original meaning of "The church", one must ask what they mean by their usage of "the church"!

¹²Acts 6

Is “the church” simply the general gathering of people who say they are Christians and part of “the church” or does the word “church” the use have historical meaning in the same way that words like “India”, “Nepal” or “Bhutan”, indicate actual places, not just an idea or a feeling?

The church began under the teaching of apostles, who also instructed to “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”¹³ The authentic faith, doctrines of the holy church is maintained by the Scripture and the holy traditions that support it. Again St. Paul says, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”¹⁴

Middle of the first Century, there arose a dispute over the adherence to the Old Testament laws in Antioch. The matters could not be settled there, and higher church authorities help was needed. The leaders from the Antioch Church, sent St. Paul and St. Barnabas to Jerusalem for the Apostolic Council. The matter was discussed and a written decision was made by St. James, the Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem. This is known as the Council of Jerusalem. Then again there was a heresy that was propagated by one Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt, denying the eternity of the Son of God, claiming, contrary to apostles’ doctrine, that the Son was created being. This heresy was dealt with at the church Council met in Nicea in AD 325. Some 300 bishops and church leaders, a total of about 2000

¹³II Thessalonians 2:15 ¹⁴II Thessalonians 3:6

delegates discussed the matter and gave the final verdict which we have in the Nicene Creed of the holy church.

Biblically and historically, “the church” carries the elaborated explanation as we read in the Nicene Creed of the holy church, “we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”

The church always for 2000 years has maintained that in order to be authentically apostolic, those claiming to be bishops must be able to show an unbroken historical continuity with the early apostolic church that was founded by the Lord Jesus - that is, the bishops derive their authority through the direct line of laying of hands from the apostles. The Scripture says, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”¹⁵

One of the outstanding characteristics of the historic church is its changelessness, its continuity, its faithfulness from age to age and its orderly apostolic succession.

Believers Eastern Church Governance

Believers Eastern Church is part of the universal church that follows the apostolic teaching, holy traditions and orthodox faith and practices of 2000 years of Christian faith. We are both ancient and future in our faith and practice.

We believe that the Book of Acts, with its strong commitment to the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus, is the blueprint for the holy church, and we function with

¹⁵1 Corinthians 3:11

a constitution and canon law that helps in our vision, focus and unity in our church, worldwide.

Just like the other church denominations that emerged at different times throughout the 2000 years of church history, Believers Eastern Church is also in the lineage of the apostolic succession, with its historical and constitutional episcopacy.

As we follow in this historical and biblical form of church governance, it helps us maintain meaningful fellowship, loyalty, accountability, unity, staying with the orthodox faith and interdependence—all serving together as one body for the glory of God. This form of government starts at the local parish and connects to the church's holy Synod.

In regards to ministry, each local parish has its own independence, while at the same time is interdependent and in submission to the leaders of the church. The local parish and its elders submit to or priest. He is the shepherd to lead the flock, feeding the sheep with God's Word and leading them in the ways of God. He in turn submits to the bishop who God has placed over him as his authority. Under the leadership of the parish priest, each local parish has its own church council, which is selected by the congregation and approved by the diocesan bishop and local priest and gives leadership to the church according to the church's constitution and canon law.

Spiritual oversight, administration and church ministry is organized by dioceses, which normally consist of multiple parishes in a specific geographic location. Every diocese is under the spiritual guidance of a bishop.

Because of the growth of the church, Archdioceses have been established in certain regions to allow a bishop to serve multiple dioceses. Each diocese has its own councils and boards to provide governance, leadership and service. The church's dioceses are overseen by a conference of bishops that functions under the leadership of the metropolitan bishop.

I would encourage you to read the book 'Believers Eastern Church' which will help you to get a fuller understanding of the functions, governance and structure of our church.

Believers Eastern Church is committed to adhering to the orthodox faith and practice of the ancient church at every level of leadership. With this as our guide, the church will be able continue growing in understanding of the Lord. May His name be glorified as we seek to follow Him and walk in His ways.

THE BLESSED HOPE
OF THE CHURCH

*“For the Lord Himself will descend
from heaven with a shout,
with the voice of an archangel,
and with the trumpet of God.
And the dead in Christ will rise first.
Then we who are alive
and remain shall be caught up together
with them in the clouds to meet
the Lord in the air.
And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16–17

Some years ago, in an all-night prayer meeting with over 700 people, toward the early morning hours, I heard a woman's prayer that touched me deeply. Hearing the prayer, I looked around the room to see who it was. It was an old grandma who looked nearly 100 years old. Her wrinkly face was turned toward heaven, her eyes tightly shut, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. I heard her pray, "My Lord Jesus, the fairest of ten thousand, when will You come back? I have been waiting for You all these years. How much longer must I wait? I want to see You. . . when will You come back?" Her face glowed as she was lost in the wonder of heaven. Through her words and her upward gaze, I could see her deep longing and expectation for the Lord's return. Everything within her was crying out, "Maranatha! O Lord, come!"¹

My brothers and sisters, this world is not our home. We are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth, here for a short time; we are only passing through. Our destiny and our true home is heaven.

From eternity past, it was the plan of God to find a Bride for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world and paid the price for her with His own blood on the cross. But before He returned to His Father in heaven, He promised that He would come again to take

¹I Corinthians 16:22.

us, His Bride, home to be with Him forever. And now we eagerly wait for the Word of Jesus to be fulfilled: “I will come again.”²

We are living on borrowed time. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is at hand. Therefore, “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”³

The early church lived with this constant anticipation and longing for the coming of the Lord. Day and night, they worshiped the Lord and lived as witnesses to His great salvation and power. This spurred them on to preach the gospel everywhere and to everyone, even when persecuted! One of the most outstanding motivations they had to live, serve and abandon everything for the sake of Christ was the realization that at any time—any moment—Christ could return.

Their constant partaking of the Lord’s Table served as witness to this fact, for the Lord Jesus told them to “do this in remembrance of Me.”⁴ “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”⁵ Every time we come to the Lord’s Table, it should confirm in us once again that He is coming for us and that we will be a part of that great gathering—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.⁶

It seems the early church thought more about the Second Coming than about death and heaven. They were so confident of the Lord’s return in their lifetime that some even stopped working.⁷ Others became concerned about what would happen to their loved ones who died

²St. John 14:3 ³Titus 2:13 ⁴St. Luke 22:19 ⁵I Corinthians 11:26 ⁶Revelation 19:9

⁷II Thessalonians 3:16-22.

before His return. In response to their questions, St. Paul answered,

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”⁸

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”⁹ He was right; we are made for another world. He echoed the Apostle Paul, who said, “I desire to depart and be with Christ.”¹⁰

The first coming of Christ was the most important event in history. Even greater, His Second Coming will be the end of all history as we know it. One of these days, may be even before you finish reading this chapter, Christ will come to take His Bride home!

⁸I Thessalonians 4:13-18 ⁹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1975) p. 120 ¹⁰Philippians 1:23.

These Present Days

We live in exciting days. All around us, God is orchestrating the final events leading to the return of Jesus. Just like one would line up dominos, God is aligning world situations, getting ready to tip the first event, which will trigger a serious chain reaction of events ultimately climaxing in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in power and great authority. This first event—the *rapture* of the church—could take place any time now!

When Jesus first spoke to His disciples about the end of time, they eagerly wanted to know what and when it would happen.

“Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?” Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”¹¹

Anyone who reads the newspaper or watches the news can clearly see that there is no way this world can continue functioning the way it is for much longer. Man has no hope of solving the problems he faces; whether it is the economy, food production, natural disasters or health epidemics, we are at a loss.

The Bible speaks of the distress of nations, with

¹¹St. Luke 21:7, 10–11, 16, 28.

perplexity.¹² The word *perplexity* in the Greek literally means “no way out.” It’s interesting how man tries to devise solutions to the many problems in the world when Scripture clearly shows that there is *only one way out—the way up*.¹³

It is clear that “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”¹⁴ But one thing is for sure—His coming is close. I believe that the Son is ready to come and take His Bride; He is only waiting for the Father to say, “Son, it is time. Go.”

All history is moving toward that moment. St. Matthew 24 talks about wars, famine and natural calamities. The book of Daniel speaks of worldwide travel. All throughout Scripture, numerous signs are given. Read for yourself; you will be surprised to see how all this is taking place right before our eyes.

Jesus told His disciples this parable, “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.”¹⁵

When interpreting the Scripture, there is a principle called expositional constancy, which means that when dealing with particular passages of Scripture, certain words repeated throughout the text, even though used in different situations, are all linked by the same meaning. So is the case with St. Luke’s Gospel 21 and the parable of the fig trees (found also in St. Matthew’s Gospel 24 and St. Mark’s Gospel 13). Throughout the Bible, the fig tree represents Israel.¹⁶ When we read in the Scripture about

¹²St. Luke 21:25 ¹³St. Luke 21:28 ¹⁴St. Mark 13:32 ¹⁵St. Luke 21:29-31 ¹⁶Jeremiah 5, 8, 24.

the fig tree putting forth tender leaves, it is speaking of the children of Israel regathering back to their homeland. In 1948 we saw this happen—one of the most significant signs of the Lord’s return: The children of Israel gathered back to their homeland after centuries of being scattered all over the world.

Prophecy says that “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” This long period began in 606 B.C., when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Israel and Judah, besieged Jerusalem and carried its inhabitants into captivity. Since then, the Gentiles have ruled the homeland of the Israelites. But in early 1948, the long withered tree began to put forth tender shoots. In May of that year, against all odds, Israel became a nation.

Amazing, isn’t it? For some 2500 years, Israel was under the control of Gentiles. But when the time was fulfilled, the Gentiles’ trampling came to an end, and the children of Israel emigrated from the world over to reclaim their land. Jesus said that after this happened, He would soon come.¹⁷

Evidence To Believe

Can we really believe these things? Is there any basis on which we can rely upon the prophecies found in Scripture? One way to be certain of these end times is to look through Scripture and see all the prophecies that *already have* come to pass. One fourth of the entire Bible is prophecy. Think about that; and remember, “All those things God gave to us in His Word and revealed to us,

¹⁷St. Luke 21:24.

it is for us and our children” (paraphrase).¹⁸ Up to this point, 100 percent—every single prophecy God gave—has happened; not one has failed. Jesus said that “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”¹⁹

For example, nearly 500 years before the Exodus under Moses, God told Abraham that his descendants would end up in a strange, foreign land, be enslaved for 400 years and then be freed. In Exodus 12–18, we see all of this happened just as God said it would.

Another example is how God told the prophets that there would come an empire named Babylon that would take the children of Israel captive for 70 years. Long before the event would take place, Isaiah and many other prophets predicted the fall of Babylon, which was accomplished when Cyrus entered the city on October 29, 539 B.C. It is startling to note that in Isaiah 45, Cyrus is named by God 150 years before his birth as the one appointed for this task. The events that took place the night Babylon fell to Cyrus are described precisely in Daniel 5. Every word the Lord said came to pass.

Then there are more than 300 prophecies about Christ’s first coming into the world, such as where He would be born, the difficult circumstances He would face and the date and events of His crucifixion. Every one of these prophecies was fulfilled. Seven hundred years before Christ was ever born, the details of the crucifixion were foretold in Psalm 22. At the time this psalm was written, there was no such thing as crucifixion. The Romans created it hundreds of years later.

¹⁸St. Luke 21:32 ¹⁹St. Matthew 24:35.

Another example of prophecy fulfilled is seen in St. Luke's Gospel 21. The account tells how the disciples and Jesus were walking past the great temple in Jerusalem. The disciples marveled at the majestic structure adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus, knowing what was to come, turned to His disciples and said, "These things which you see—*the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down*" (emphasis mine).²⁰

Think about this. The temple sat on 40 acres of level, flat land on top of a mountain. It was 90 feet in height and the stones used for its building each weighed 400 tons and were 41 feet long. This was the most spectacular building ever constructed, the pride and joy of Israel, and Jesus was saying it would be destroyed. I'm sure the disciples found that hard to believe.

But in AD 70, 40 years after Christ spoke those words, the Roman governor, Titus, sent in his soldiers to take the city and kill as many as they could. He firmly commanded his men not to touch the temple. But one soldier, drunk from celebrating the victory of the battle, threw a torch into the temple, igniting the temple curtain and setting the whole structure up in flames. In the intense heat of the fire, the gold that ordained the top of the temple melted, filling the cracks of the stones. The Roman soldiers, greedy to get the melted gold from the cracks, turned over every stone trying to get all the gold they possibly could. How exact the words of Christ came true!

Those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ can live in great expectation, knowing that God will fulfill His

²⁰St. Luke 21:6.

promises and that the things He spoke will come to pass, just as they have since the beginning of time. He *will* come for us!

The Beginning Of The End

I once heard the story of a minister in Germany who was driving on the highway when he saw a hitchhiker. He decided to pull over and give the man a ride. As they were driving along, the stranger began to talk to the man about Christ. With much passivity, the minister assured the stranger that he already knew the Saviour.

Surprised by the clergy's attitude, the stranger said, "Do you realize the Lord Jesus is coming soon? The time is later than you think." Those words burned into the clergy's heart. He turned to look at the stranger only to realize the man was gone; he had vanished. Recognizing that the Lord had sent an angel to warn him of the urgency of the hour, the minister changed his ways and lived a life on fire for the Lord.

My brothers and sisters, the Lord is sending the same reminder to us—the time is later than we think. He is coming back soon for His people.²¹

The Rapture

The rapture refers to that event when Jesus, without warning, will come to snatch away His church from this earth. All prophecy up until this moment has already been fulfilled; the rapture is the next event to take place, and it could happen at any time.

²¹I Thessalonians 4:16-18.

In the English Bible, the word *rapture* means to be “caught up.” These are also the same words used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NIV)—“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

What awesome words the Bible uses to describe the event of the Lord’s coming for His church! It tells us that no one, nothing can hinder Him. With force, He will snatch us away and bring us to Himself.

Referring to the Rapture, St. Paul said, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible.”²² It doesn’t say in the “wink of an eye.” It says “twinkling.” Your eye can twinkle 10 times in just one wink. Think about that. The rapture will happen much faster than the wink of an eye. Suddenly you are going to be gathered together with all the believers from around the world, the whole church and all the saints who have gone before, forever to be with the Lord. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”²³

The Apostle John said, “what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”²⁴ Jesus is going to appear very soon one of these

²²I Corinthians 15:52 ²³Philippians 3:20-21 ²⁴I John 3:2.

days, and we are going to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and we are going to be just like Him.

Chuck Smith, in speaking of the Rapture, shares how the Apostle Paul, in writing to the Church at Corinth, described the metamorphosis that will take place— “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”²⁵ One of these days very soon there are going to be some beautiful changes made. I am going to get a whole new body direct from God, geared and equipped for the universe. No longer earthbound, but a body that has been adapted to the environmental conditions of the universe. As we have been born bearing the image of the earthly—I born of my father, the flesh and blood—we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

I am made up of 14 elements that compose the dust of the earth, but I am going to have a new body, which will be made up of the elements that compose God’s eternal kingdom. I do not know what they are yet; I will find out one of these days. I am living in a perishing tent, but I am going to move into an incorruptible house, one that is not defiled and fades not away, that has been reserved in heaven for me. And I am being kept by the power of God through faith.

The rapture will happen so fast, just like in a car accident. You really won’t know what hit you until it is all over. All of a sudden, you are going to take a breath and there is no smoke. The whole thing is going to be opened up in such glory, such beauty, such love, such joy that you

²⁵I Corinthians 15:53.

have never before felt. And when the realization hits of what happened—wow, what a kind of accelerated feeling I am looking forward to when Jesus comes.

There are others who will have an opposite emotion. All of a sudden they are looking for their friends, relatives, brothers and sisters, but all they will find is the empty room, empty building. And when the realization takes place it happened, it will be too late. I am too late. What a horrible feeling.²⁶

The Tribulation

After the church is raptured, all the believers will be with the Lord in heaven for a seven-year period. These will be glorious years in which we will take part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.²⁷

But a different scenario will take place on earth. After the rapture of the church, the Tribulation on earth begins. This will be the worst time mankind has ever experienced. All the wars, disasters and tragedies that have plagued mankind combined will not even begin to compare to the suffering that will take place during the Tribulation. Scripture tells us that men and women will want to die, calling for the mountains to fall on them, but there will be no relief.²⁸

I believe Scripture shows that the tribulation cannot begin until the presence of the church is removed from the earth. St. Paul speaks of this in 2 Thessalonians 2:7–8, “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He[a] who now restrains *will do so* until He[b] is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed,

²⁶C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1975) p. 120 ²⁷Revelation 19:9 ²⁸Revelation 6:16.

whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

The forces and the spirit of the Antichrist are in the world today, at this very moment. The only thing hindering them from taking over is the presence of the church and the Holy Spirit.

Examples of this removal of the church before God pours out His wrath are seen over and over again throughout the Old Testament. Consider the story of Lot, Abraham’s nephew who lived in the immoral city of Sodom. When the angels were on their way to destroy the city, God revealed His plans to Abraham. Abraham pleaded to God for Lot and his family to be saved, saying, “Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”²⁹

The angels went to Lot’s house, warning him to flee the city because it would soon be destroyed. Over and over again, they urged Lot to hurry and flee to the hills.

When he still was not moving fast enough, one of the angels turned to him and said, “Hurry, escape there. *For I cannot do anything until you arrive there*” (emphasis mine).³⁰ They could not carry out the destruction until Lot was out of Sodom.

Lot was a type of the church that is to be delivered. This is the same thing that God did with Noah, removing him and his family from the wicked so that He could judge and destroy.³¹ God will deliver the righteous while reserving the ungodly for the Day of Judgment.

I do not believe the church will go through the Great Tribulation. Romans 5:9 tells us, “Much more then,

²⁹Genesis 18:23 ³⁰Genesis 19:22 ³¹Genesis 6:5.

having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved from wrath* through Him” (emphasis mine). We read the same thought in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis mine). On the other hand, the wrath of God is poured out against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the unsaved world.³²

It is true that as believers living in this world, we will have tribulation. Even Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.”³³ And “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”³⁴ The tribulation Jesus is speaking of in these verses is that which comes from Satan and the unseen powers and principalities that stand against the church.³⁵ When Satan is the source of tribulation, the children of God can expect persecution.

But the tribulation that comes in these end times is the tribulation that comes from God pouring out His wrath upon an unbelieving world. When God is the source of tribulation, it is a different story. God has already judged our sins on the Cross of Jesus Christ. As believers, we are sons and daughters of the living God, redeemed from wrath by the blood of the Lamb. His judgment is poured out against the unrighteous, not against His Bride.

During the time of the tribulation, the spirit of the Antichrist will take precedence and deceive many. He will cause everyone to receive a number or a mark on their right hand or forehead, without which no one will be able to buy or sell. This mark is called the “mark of

³²Romans 1:18 ³³St. John 15:18 ³⁴St. John 16:33 ³⁵Ephesians 6:10-12.

the beast.”³⁶ This may sound impossible, but right now the technology is all in place for this to happen. A tiny computer chip is being designed to fit under the skin and will be able to contain the complete personal information of an individual. In fact, similar chips are already being used in Western countries to keep track of pets. In the event that someone loses their cat or dog, the small chip implanted in the animal, allows Global Positioning System satellites to locate the lost animal within seconds.

The world is absolutely ready for the Antichrist to come on the scene. Almost every nation in the world today is engaged in war, either civil war or war with a neighbour. And almost every government is talking about not only a one-world court, which we now have, but also the need for a one-world government (which will eventually be led by the Antichrist).

The only thing that prevents the Antichrist from revealing himself and the whole world coming together to say, “Hail our king!” is the Body of Christ. The one who stands in the way is still here.

The Second Coming of Christ

The rapture is when Jesus *comes* for His saints; the Second Coming is when Jesus returns to the earth *with* His saints to establish His thousand-year reign. When He comes to take us home—the rapture—His feet will not touch the ground. We will be caught up to meet Him in the sky. But Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will *appear with Him* in glory” (emphasis mine). And Jude 14 says, “Behold, the Lord comes *with* ten thousands of His saints” (emphasis mine).

³⁶Revelation 13:17.

During the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, Satan and all his forces will be bound. At the end of the thousand-year reign, the Great White Throne Judgment is set up. All humanity from the beginning of time will be raised from the dead to be judged before the throne of God.³⁷

The Great White Throne Judgment is not for believers; it is for unbelievers, for people who do not know the Lord, who might have gone to church all their lives but never repented and gave their hearts to Christ. They may have memorized the Bible, prayed and gave money, but if they were not born again in their hearts by the blood of the Lamb, their names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life: "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."³⁸

Satan, his demons, all the unbelieving and hell itself will be cast into the lake of fire.³⁹

Jack Chick wrote a little booklet called *This Was Your Life*. It talks about a man who stands before the judgment seat, and all of a sudden a movie is turned on—a movie of his own life. From the day he was born until the day he died, his entire life flashes before him. As he sees his sin, he cries, "I don't want to see! I don't want to see! I don't want to see!" Things nobody on earth ever knew about him—things he thought, things he did, everything—are out in the open. The booklet ends with the man in deep regret because he never gave his life to Christ, and he is cast into hell.

Let me ask you: If the rapture were to take place today, are you sure you would go to meet Jesus in the sky? Do you know for sure that your name is written by

³⁷Revelation 20:11 ³⁸Revelation 20:15 ³⁹Revelation 20:1-3, 7-15; 21:1-4; 22:1-5.

the Lord in the Lamb's Book of Life? Are you ready and prepared for His coming?

Soon, time shall no more be!

How Now Shall We Live?

The blessed hope of the Body of Christ is that soon we are going home. We will soon be with the Lord Jesus; we will look upon His face and be with Him forever.

In the light of this truth, how must we live? This is the same question St. Peter addressed in his second letter to the church, saying, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless."⁴⁰ The Apostle John says it this way: "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."⁴¹

There are four areas we can check in our life to be ready for the Lord's return.

One, prepare yourself. No one can prepare you for the Lord's coming except yourself. Therefore, keep a short account with God. Never live in sin. Live with great longing for holiness in an intimate walk with God. He is not coming back for a harlot. He is not coming back for a Bride who is soiled and corrupted, having an affair with the world. He is coming back for a holy, spotless Bride without blemish.

⁴⁰II Peter 3:11-12,14 ⁴¹I John 3:3.

Remember the parable of the 10 virgins.⁴² Five were ready and went with the bridegroom; five were not and were left outside. Be sure you are among those who are ready.

If you are not ready to meet the Lord Jesus, call upon Him right now. Pray this prayer sincerely, by faith: “Lord God, I am a sinner and I have not lived my life for You. Thank You for loving me and having mercy on me by sending Your Son, Jesus, to die for me on the Cross of Calvary. I ask You to forgive me and wash me clean from my sins. I receive the forgiveness you have made freely available through the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus. Come into my life, take up residence in my heart and be my King, my Lord, and my Saviour. From this day forward, I will no longer be controlled by sin or the desire to please myself, but I will follow You all the days of my life that I might please You and be with You in heaven forever. I pray this in Jesus’ precious and holy name. Amen.”

Two, be faithful in service. St. Luke 18:8 asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Then in the parable of the faithful and evil servant, found in the Gospel of St. Luke 12, Jesus said, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he

⁴²St. Matthew 25:1-13.

is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”⁴³

If the Lord were to come in the next half hour, would you be able to stand before Him without shame? Is your heart fully committed to Him, to serving the Lord with diligence and joy up until the moment He returns? Are you continuing in fasting, prayer, witnessing, giving, helping and serving? Be proactive while you wait, that He may find you faithfully at work when He returns.

Three, remain in love. Jesus said, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”⁴⁴ Do you truly know the Lord; do you truly love Him with all your heart? Do you love Him more than sin, more than friends, more than your personal habits, more than anything else in this world?

The Lord Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.”⁴⁵ I pray He will not say this to any of us. May our hearts be found true to Him, remaining in His love. How do we do that? Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”⁴⁶

Four, have a correct perspective on material things. Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁴⁷

⁴³St. Luke 12:43-46 ⁴⁴St. Matthew 24:12-13 ⁴⁵Revelation 2:4 ⁴⁶St. John 15:10

⁴⁷St. Matthew 6:19-21.

Knowing that all things on this earth will be destroyed in the end,⁴⁸ we should invest our resources in sharing God's love with those who do not know it yet. Whatever you can give away with a joyful heart to bring hope to the broken world around you, I encourage you, give it away!

I want to conclude with this thought from C. S. Lewis: "At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, someday, God willing, we shall get *in*."⁴⁹

A few months ago, one of our bishops for the country of Nepal made a humorous statement—perhaps true—at one of our clergys' conferences. He said, "When the Lord Jesus returns to bring us home, members of our Believers Eastern Church in Nepal will go up to meet Him first, since some of our churches are on the highest altitudes on this earth—the foothills of the Himalayan mountains!" We all laughed. But one thing is true: Soon—very soon—we will meet Him in the air! What a day that will be, as we will be joined with saints from centuries past and all over the world to finally look upon the face of our Lord and be with Him forever! I can't wait!

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"⁵⁰

PS. There are many theories of second coming of Christ. Some believe in Pre-trip, Mid-trip, Pre-Tribulation, Post-Tribulation, Millennial view and so on. In whatever view one hold, one thing is certain for sure- we all believe

⁴⁸II Peter 3:10 ⁴⁹C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishers, 2001), p. 43 ⁵⁰Revelation 22:20.

the Lord Jesus is coming back. And that one conviction should help us to love one another and focus on doing all we can to fulfil the Great Commission.

APPENDIX ONE

THE EMBLEM OF BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH



The early church fathers chose the symbol of the cross as a reminder of all that Christ had done for them. Its two bars were already a cosmic symbol from remote antiquity representing the axis between heaven and earth. Their choice had a specific explanation. They wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus, neither His birth nor His youth, neither His teaching nor His service, neither His resurrection nor His reign, nor the gift of the Spirit, but rather His crucifixion and His death.

Richard Hooker, a 16th-century theologian, applauded the fact that the early church fathers, in spite of heathen scorn at the sufferings of Christ, “chose rather the sign

of the cross than any other outward mark, whereby the world might most easily discern always what they were.”¹

The Cross and the Circle

While the *circle* in the logo represents *eternity*, the cross is not enclosed or contained within the circle. It goes beyond the circle, implying that the cross is the centrality of our faith and that its significance transcends eternity. It represents the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross.²

So it is the supreme priority of our church to enable God’s people to know Jesus more fully and intimately and hunger to become like Him. Thus they will manifest Christ’s life as they die to self through the cross and follow in His footsteps.³

The four emblems within the circle stand for the emphases we have in Believers Eastern Church.

Book

The book represents the Word of God.⁴ We believe the Bible is the only and absolute authority for our faith and conduct. No tradition, no matter how good it may be, should ever violate the Word of God. The sole authority for the faith and practice of the church is the Bible and nothing else.

Teaching through the God’s Word systematically to feed the sheep is emphasized in Believers Eastern Church. We

¹Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, chapter IXV 20, “*Of the Cross in Baptism.*”

²Galatians 2:20; 6:14, Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 2:11–16. ³Galatians 2:20; 6:14, I Peter 2:21 ⁴Isaiah 40:8; 55:10–11; St. Matthew 7:24–25; St. John 20:31; Acts 2:42; 6:4, Galatians 1:8–12; II Timothy 3:15–17; 4:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 22:18–19.

give great emphasis and supreme priority on the teaching of God's Word in our worship services and other Bible study gatherings for the believers to grow into Christ's likeness.⁵

Dove

The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit.⁶ We give biblical emphasis to the working of the Holy Spirit as is described in the New Testament. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, no one can live a victorious Christian life; hence, we give biblical emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit and fruit of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life.

Heart

The heart represents agape love. We believe that love is the most important trait of a follower of Christ, without which we have no right to call ourselves Christians. We give priority to teaching on the unity of the Body of Christ and in living out love in practical terms, thus expanding the kingdom of God.⁷

Fish

During the severe persecution of the early church, Christians used the non-committal painting of a fish to identify and greet one another, only known by the

⁵II Corinthians 3:1–18 ⁶St. Matthew 3:11; St. Luke 11:13; 12:12; St. John 4:24; 7:38–39; 15:26; Acts 1:8, 2; 4:8; 4:31; 8:15; 11:15–16; 13:2–4; 13:9; 13:52; 16: 6–7; 19:2–5; Romans 8:1–27; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:9; I Thessalonians 5:19⁷St. John 13:14–17; 13:31–35; 15:12–13; Romans 13:8; I Corinthians 1: 8; I Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13–26; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 1: 9; I Timothy 1:5; I Peter 1:22; I John 2:10; 3:11–23; 4:7–21.

believers themselves. The ichthys (“fish”) was an acronym for Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour). But it did not remain the Christian sign because the association between Jesus and the fish was purely acronymic and has no visual significance.

The fish sign in the Believers Eastern Church logo is used with its direct connection and link with the mission of the church as it was told by Christ Himself, “Follow Me and I will make you ‘fishers’ of men.” Therefore, we acknowledge our commitment and passion to fulfill the Great Commission—our call from Christ, who is the head of the church.⁸

Thus, the unique character of Believers Eastern Church is expressed in the design of the logo—a people deeply committed to the faith and practice as revealed in the Word.

⁸St. Matthew 28:19; St. John 4:35–38; 15:27; 20:23; Acts 1:21; 10:42; 16:4; 18:9–10; 20:28; Romans 10:13–15; 12:6–8; I Corinthians 9:16–17; II Corinthians 4:1–5; 5:14–17; 6:3–10; Ephesians 4:11; 6:20; II Timothy 4:1–5.

APPENDIX TWO

FAITH OF OUR CHURCH

Believers Eastern Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments – 66 books containing all things necessary for salvation – as the supreme and foundational standard of faith. We believe in the absoluteness of the Scripture. We believe that the Bible, Old and New Testaments in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God: a complete and final written revelation of God.¹

We believe in all the fundamental doctrines of ancient Biblical Christianity. We accept and confess the historic Creed of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus. We believe and practice the holy sacraments followed by the historical church.

We believe in one personal, transcendent and holy God, the creator of all, who is eternal, and who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

¹II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20–21; St. Matthew 5:18; St. John 16:12–13 ²Deuteronomy 6:4; St. Matthew 28:19; St. John 1:1–2; II Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6.

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a human, that He is the promised Messiah, was born of Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His death on the cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to intercede for us.³

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit onto the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfil His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.⁴

We believe that all people are, by nature, separated from God and responsible for their own sin, but salvation, redemption and forgiveness are generously offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

We believe that when people believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, their sins are forgiven, and they become the children of God.⁶

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in, seals and empowers all believers, baptizing them into the Body of Christ.

We believe that the Holy Spirit fills all believers who ask in faith, enabling them to communicate the gospel in power.⁷

We also believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are for today and should be exercised within the scriptural guidelines.⁸

³St. John 1:1; St. Matthew 1:20–23; II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12; St. John 16:7–11; St. Matthew 19:28; 25:31; II Timothy 2:8 ⁴St. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:8; 4:31, ⁵Genesis 3; Romans 3:23; 5:12; I John 1:8; Ephesians 2:3–10 ⁶Ephesians 1:7; 2:1–10; St. John 1:12 ⁷I Corinthians 12:13; II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; St. Matthew 28:16–20; Acts 1:8 ⁸I Corinthians 12, 14.

We believe that agape love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love, all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.⁹

Believers Eastern Church prioritises guiding each believer along an intimate walk with Jesus and being formed anew in His image.¹⁰

We believe in the Second Coming of Christ, His living with His saints, and the rapture of church. It will be personal and visible.¹¹

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its message can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.¹²

We believe in the resurrection of the body unto eternal life for the redeemed and unto eternal punishment for the lost.¹³

⁹I Corinthians 13 ¹⁰Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:1–7; II Corinthians 3:18 ¹¹Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 15:51–52; Acts 2:38–47; I Thessalonians 4:13–18; I John 3:2–3; I Corinthians 11:23–26 ¹²Isaiah 28:13; Acts 20:27; Nehemiah 8:8; St. Matthew 7:24; James 1:22–24 ¹³Revelation 20; Acts 24:25; St. John 5:28–29; St. Luke 16:19–31; II Corinthians 5:8; I Thessalonians 4:14–17; I John 3:2.0

APPENDIX THREE

THE GOSPEL ON GEORGE STREET

A few years ago, I heard this following story from a friend and I was deeply touched by it. I am sure that you will be encouraged and challenged by this simple man's life too.

This all started a number of years ago in a church in South London. The Sunday morning service was closing as a man stood up at the back and raised his hand and said, "Excuse me! Can I share a short testimony?" he asked. The priest looked at his watch and said, "You have three minutes." Then man proceeded with his story.

"I have just moved into this area and I used to live in Sydney one of the largest cities in Australia. Just a few months back I was visiting some relatives and I was walking down a street named George Street in Sydney. A strange little white-haired man stepped out from a shop, put a pamphlet in my hand and said, 'Excuse me sir, are you saved? If you die tonight are you going to heaven?' I was astounded by these words, no one had ever asked

me that. I thanked him and all the way home this puzzled me. I called a friend and thank God he was a Christian, and that friend led me to Christ.”

A little while later, while on a short trip to Australia, this priest was talking with a woman who had come for prayer. He asked her how she came to know about Jesus. To his question she responded, “a couple of months back I was shopping down George Street. A strange little white-haired man stepped out of a shop doorway and offered me a tract and said, “Excuse me madam, are you saved? If you died tonight are you going to heaven?” I was disturbed by those words. When I got home I knew a church which was on the next block from me. I sought out the priest and he led me to Christ.”

This London priest was now very puzzled. Twice in two weeks he had heard the same testimony! While in Australia he traveled to another city where he met the elder of a church. While they were interacting, He asked him, how he came to know Jesus. He said, “I grew up in this church from the age of fifteen, I never made commitment to Jesus, just hopped on the band-wagon like everyone else. Because of my business ability I grew up, my business grew up to a place of great influence. I was on a business trip to Sydney just three years ago. An obnoxious, spiteful little man stepped out of shop doorway offered me a religious pamphlet, cheap junk! He accosted me with a question, “Excuse me sir! Are you saved? If you die tonight are you going to heaven?” I tried to tell him I was a church goer for many years and he wouldn’t listen. I was seething with anger all the way to my home. I told my priest thinking that he would sympathise with me, but he said he had been disturbed

for years knowing that I didn't have a relationship with Jesus and he was right. He then led me to the Lord Jesus Christ three years ago."

Later, this priest came back to London and soon he was speaking at another meeting in England, where he shared some of these testimonies about these people getting this tract there in Australia and coming to Christ. And after him saying this, four elderly people came up and explained that they too had been saved between twenty-five and thirty years earlier through that same little man on George street who offered them this gospel tract and asked them the same old questions.

The following week this priest went to a similar meeting in another part of the world. He shared the same testimonies at the close of his teaching and three people came forward and said they too had been saved fifteen, twenty-five years ago from the little man's tract and his testimony.

The priest next, went to Atlanta, Georgia, USA to speak at an American Naval Chaplain's Convention. Afterward the 3-day convention was over, the Chaplain General, took the priest out for a meal and asked the Chaplain how he became a Christian. "It was miraculous", he said, "I was on a Naval battleship and lived a reprobate life. We were doing exercise in the South Pacific and we docked at Sydney harbour for supply. That day I was so drunk that I got on the wrong bus and got off on George Street. As I got off the bus I thought I saw a ghost as this man jumped out in front of me, pushed a pamphlet in my hand and said, 'Sailor! Are you saved? If you die tonight are you going to heaven?' The fear of God hit me immediately"

he said, "I was shocked sober, ran back to the ship and sought out the Christian Chaplain. He led me to Christ. I soon began to prepare for the ministry under his guidance. I am now in charge of one thousand chaplains and others who are eager on sharing Gods love."

Story continues. Six months later that London priest went to a conference in a South Asian country where five thousand people had gathered. At the end of the meetings, the local priest took this priest to his home for a simple meal. He asked how had come to Christ. The priest replied, "I grew up in a very privileged position. I worked for many countries on Diplomatic Mission and I have traveled the world over. But I would be very embarrassed if people found out what I got into."

One period of diplomatic service took me to Sydney. I was doing some last-minute shopping, laden with toys and clothing for my children, when a courteous white haired little man stepped out in front of me and offered me a gospel tract and said, 'Excuse me sir! Are you saved? If you die tonight are you going to heaven?' I thanked him very much, but this disturbed me greatly. I got back to my town, sought out a religious man. He couldn't help me, but he advised me that to satisfy my curious mind I should go and talk to the Christian in a home at the end of the road. That was good advice because that day that Christian led me to Jesus Christ. I left the diplomatic service and here I am today serving my Lord."

Eight months later our London priest was preaching in Sydney, Australia. He asked the local priest if he knew of a little, elderly, white haired man who handed out gospel tracts on George Street. He replied, "Yes I do! His name

is Mr. Jenner. Although I don't think he does it anymore because he is so frail and so old."

Two nights later they went to meet this old man in his little apartment. They knocked on the door and this tiny, frail, old man greeted them, he sat them down and made them tea. He was so frail that he was slopping the tea into the saucer as his hands shook. The London priest sat there and told him of all these account from the previous years, of the so many people he met that came to Christ through the gospel tract that he gave on George Street.

This little old man sat with tears running down his cheeks. He told them his story. "You see I was on an Australian war ship. I was living a reprobate life. One of my colleagues whom I gave literally hell to was there to help me. He led me to Jesus Christ and Jesus changed my life that very night. I was so grateful to God I promised that I would share Jesus in simple witness with at least ten people a day and as God gave me strength I did that.

Sometimes I was ill and couldn't do it but I made up for those days I missed it by doing more on the other days. I wasn't paranoid about it. I have done this for forty years. In my retirement years, the best place was on George Street where I saw hundreds of people a day. I got lots of rejections, but a lot of people heard what I said and got my gospel tract." Finally, he said, "You know what? I have never, never heard of one single person coming to know Jesus until this day. Forty years on George Street. 'Madam... Sir... Sailor! Are you saved? If you die tonight will you go to heaven? Never, never one person came to Christ, I never saw it.'"

To show gratitude and love for Jesus, to do that for forty years? That simple, little, man witnessed to some

hundred and forty-seven thousand people in his lifetime. Two weeks after the visit of the London priest, Mr. Jenner died. I doubt his face ever would have appeared on the cover of any Christian magazines; I doubt there ever would have been a photograph or a write up about him anywhere. No one except a little group of parishioners in Sydney knew about Mr. Jenner. But I tell you his name was famous in heaven. Heaven knew him, and you can imagine the welcome and the red carpet and the fanfare that he received when he went home to glory.

What must we learn from it? For years I have asked our church members to carry a few gospel tracts with them, wherever they go. Make it a habit to give out at least 5 or 10 tracts a day to people that do not know that the Lord Jesus died for them, that He was buried and that on the third day He rose again and that because of His death He will forgive and save anyone who will believe in Him (St. John 3:16).

