

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF EFI PUBLICATION TRUST

aim

October 2024 ❖ PAGES 70 ❖ ₹ 20/-

A Journey of Faith


THE KINGDOM OF
GOD

The background of the cover is a vibrant blue sky filled with large, white, fluffy clouds. The clouds are scattered across the lower two-thirds of the page, creating a sense of depth and light. The overall aesthetic is clean and spiritual.



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Vol. 53 / No. 10
 AIM Annual Subscription for
 India, Nepal & Bhutan Rs. 200/-
 (Other countries \$ 20)

A monthly publication of EFI Publication Trust

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Ordinary Page (B&W) :	Rs. 2000/-
Half Page (B&W) :	Rs. 1200/-
One third Page (B&W) :	Rs. 900/-
Quarter Page (B&W) :	Rs. 500/-

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Online payment details

Name : EFI Publication Trust | Bank : State Bank of India | Account No. **54015789597** | IFSC CODE: **SBIN0040415**
 Branch : Nehru Place, New Delhi 110019

For subscription query call us: 011-26431133; Tele/Fax: 011-26285350, E-mail: aimatefi@gmail.com, website: www.efionline.org

THE TREASURER, EFI PUBLICATION TRUST, 805/92, Deepali, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110019.

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Editorial 



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

The Kingdom of God: Reflections on Lausanne 4

The recent Fourth Lausanne Congress on Global Evangelism in Seoul, South Korea, offered a powerful reminder that the Kingdom of God is not a distant dream, but a vibrant, present reality. As one of the 5,200 Christian leaders from over 200 nations who gathered there, I witnessed firsthand the breathtaking diversity and unity of the global church. It was, in many ways, a foretaste of the vision in Revelation 7:9 - a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne of God.

Yet, as we worshipped and collaborated, it became clear that

this gathering was more than just a preview of heaven. It was a call to action, a challenge to every believer to actively participate in God's redemptive work across the globe. The conversations, both on and off the platform, underscored a crucial truth: the centre of gravity in global Christianity has shifted. Most Christians today hail from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, bringing fresh perspectives on what it means to live out the gospel in contexts of poverty, persecution, and pluralism.

This shift presents both challenges and opportunities for

the global church. On one hand, it offers a richness of experience and insight that can deepen our understanding of faithful discipleship. The testimonies from believers in the Middle East, for instance, served as a powerful reminder that the gospel often thrives most vibrantly in the face of opposition. On the other hand, it challenges us to rethink our approaches to mission and evangelism, ensuring they are truly global in perspective and practice.

One of the most pressing issues that emerged during the congress was the need to maintain a balance between evangelism and holistic mission. While there was widespread agreement that the gospel encompasses more than personal salvation - that it's the good news of Christ's lordship over all creation - some participants, including Lausanne North American Director Ed Stetzer, stressed the need for a stronger emphasis on evangelism to prevent mission drift. This tension is not new to evangelical discussions, but its

prominence at Lausanne 4 highlights its ongoing importance.

The congress also grappled with challenging cultural issues, addressing topics like gender, sexuality, and identity through the lens of Scripture. The resulting Seoul Statement reaffirmed biblical teachings on human nature while acknowledging the need for thoughtful engagement with contemporary issues of identity and purpose. This willingness to engage with difficult questions, rather than avoid them, is crucial if the church is to remain relevant and faithful in our rapidly changing world.

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of Lausanne 4 was its focus on the persecuted church. This emphasis may prove to be one of the congress's most enduring legacies, as it provides a context where evangelism and holistic mission naturally converge. In the crucible of persecution, the church's witness through both word and deed becomes even more powerful and necessary.

The overwhelming sense that one took away from the congress was that of hope. The Kingdom of God is advancing, often in unexpected ways and places. A moving example of this came during the closing Eucharist service, when a Korean pastor and a Japanese pastor demonstrated the power of gospel-centred reconciliation. In that moment, we saw a vivid illustration of Christ's call to be peacemakers, a call that resonates deeply in our divided world.

As we move forward from Lausanne 4, we must hold fast to the transformative power of the gospel while recognizing the complexities of our global context. We are called to intentional discipleship, bold evangelism, and holistic ministry that addresses both spiritual and

social needs. This is not a task for lone rangers or isolated communities, but for a global family working together across cultures and generations.

The Kingdom of God is here, now, breaking into our world in countless ways. Lausanne 4 was a powerful reminder of this reality. It challenged us to see beyond our own contexts, to learn from our global brothers and sisters, and to participate more fully in God's mission. As we continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities before us, may we do so with grace, wisdom, and an unwavering commitment to making Christ known to all nations. For in this, we play our part in the unfolding story of God's Kingdom - a Kingdom that is both already here and still to come in its fullness.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal





The Kingdom of God

Mr. Chacko Thomas

"Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'" Revelation 11:15

"If we regard the kingdom of God as the rule and reign of God, the kingdom was here when our Lord was here in person. It is present now wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is acknowledged as Lord. But it is to come with a greater fulness when everybody and everything will have to acknowledge His Lordship. So, we can say that the kingdom has come, the kingdom is among us, and the kingdom is yet to come. What, then, is the relationship of

the Church to the kingdom? Surely it is this: the Church is an expression of the kingdom but is not equalled with it." [quoted in *Gems from Martin Lloyd-Jones* by Rev. Dr. Tony Sargent.]

"Jesus Shall Reign"

"Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun ..." is one of the hymns that has impacted me deeply over the years. Written in 1719, based on Psalm 72, it has inspired much mission zeal over the years. I look forward prayerfully for its fulfilment. I wonder if this song is sung as much in churches as in mission circles. I pray that we would make this song our prayer as much as our hope. The Hymn is given below.

But first allow me to say a few words about its author. Isaac Watts [1674–1748] is known as "the Father of English Hymnody." He wrote about "210 hymns in two years, which was "published in 1707, the first real hymnal in English." He "died in 1748 having written over 600 Hymns, among them are *Joy to the world, When I survey the wondrous Cross and Oh God our help in ages past* All are frequently sung today. [taken from **One Year Church History** by E.M Rusten]

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive journeys run, his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more."

To Him shall endless prayer be made, And praises throng to crown His head; His name like sweet perfume shall rise With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue Dwell on His love with sweetest song, And infant voices shall proclaim Their early blessings on His name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns: The pris'ners leap to lose their chains, The weary find

eternal rest, And all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring
The highest honors to our King,
Angels descend with songs
again, And earth repeat the loud
amen.

Why is it that the church so rarely teaches about the Kingdom of God?

The Lord taught us to pray for the Kingdom of God to come. And the Church has been praying for two thousand years for the Kingdom of God to come.

"Jesus never stopped talking about the Kingdom of God. So why is it that the church so rarely taught it?" asks Roger Forster, in his book **The Kingdom of Jesus** [2001].

The Apostles too, never stopped talking about the Kingdom. The book of Acts begins and ends with the Kingdom of God [See Acts 1:3; 28:23, 31]. The Apostle Paul's last (recorded) words to his Jewish visitors in Rome was all about "the Kingdom of God." [Acts 28:23, 31]

The term "The Kingdom of God"

does not appear as much in the Epistles, but the term "Lord" takes its place, for political reasons, perhaps. In the same way the term "The Kingdom of God" does not appear much in the Old Testament; "but what does appear frequently is the idea that God, Yahweh, is King; He, and He alone, not only in Israel, but throughout the earth." [Rev. Peter Lewis, on *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* in ***The Glory of Christ.***]

The Son of Man and the Kingdom of God

Roger Forster [1933 -2024], the founder of Ichthus Christian Fellowship, Honorary Vice President of both the Evangelical Alliance and TEAR Fund, in his book ***The Kingdom of Jesus*** writes, "(There are) two neglected subjects in the church. One is our central message of the Kingdom of God, ... The other is this title 'The Son of Man' which we hardly ever use for Jesus, intimately related to the Kingdom.

"Why (did Jesus) pick a title that is so meaningless to so many people, when He could have used 'Son of God', 'Emmanuel' or Yahweh and so on?

"Jesus called Himself 'Son of Man' so that people would understand the Messiah his way, rather than according to popular conception. His way was couched in a term which the Jewish people did not apply directly to the Messiah. ... Yet Jesus picks it up and uses it, since any other term he might have chosen would have already been used. He particularly chooses a name that is unknown. "Jesus says in Matthew's gospel, 'You will see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom' slightly changing the words from the vision in Daniel 7 where the Son of Man is seen to be coming 'in the clouds' [Mark 13:26].

"Daniel's vision is the background for understanding Jesus and his message. There are at least eight references to Daniel 7 in Matthew's gospel alone. He [Jesus] is using Daniel 7, calling himself 'the Son of Man' and talking about 'his Kingdom'. Please see Daniel 7: 9-14, quoted below from NASB.

"I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with

flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

"Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

Note: Human rulers/kingdoms are pictured as "strange beasts" while God's kingdom is pictured as "Son of Man". Isn't there is something humane about true Christianity?

Three Aspects of the Kingdom God

There are three occurrences of "the Kingdom" of God in the first six chapters of Daniel. [2: 44-45; 4: 3 & 34-35; and 6: 26-27.] And these passages express three different aspects of the Kingdom of God. The term is used in the same way throughout the New Testament, argues Roger Foster.

"So, there is the Kingdom now, there is the Kingdom to come and there is the Kingdom outside space all the time." [***The Kingdom of Jesus***, Roger Foster] Time and space would not allow me (and my lack of scholarship) to do more than just to quote those verses below. Let His word sink into us and transform us.

Daniel 2: 44-45:

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be

destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."

Daniel 4: 3 and 34-35:

"How great are His signs
And how mighty are His wonders!
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom
And His dominion is from generation to generation.

"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He

does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

Daniel 6: 26-27

"I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel;

"For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion *will be forever.*

"He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Our Lord on His Kingdom agenda:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord." [Luke 4:18-19]

Conclusion

Introducing the book *The Kingdom of Jesus*, (mentioned above), Professor Andrew Walker writes: "Roger's excitement and hope in the Kingdom shines through. He rightly sees the Kingdom as coming from outside the world, and yet recognises it as already interiorised in part by Christians within the present dispensation. ... but he also remains proactive in working for the final consummation of all things when Christ will be 'all in all'."

I like that about Roger, "His excitement and hope" and that "he remains proactive in working for the final consummation ...". That seems to me is the right response to what the Bible teaches about the Kingdom of God, if we understand it correctly.

That is why the Lord commanded us to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness".

What does "the kingdom of God" mean to you?

It is time for action!



Mr. Chacko Thomas

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A Life Worthy of the Gospel's Call: Reflections from Philippians 1:27-30

Ms. Archana Dipika Tigga

Introduction

The opening verses of Paul's letter to the Philippians set the tone for what many scholars consider to be one of his most personal and joyful writings. Unlike in his other letters, where Paul often begins by asserting his apostleship—such as in Romans, where he introduces himself as “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle”—his letter to the Philippians takes a different approach. Paul doesn't emphasize his authority or position, instead expressing confidence that his readers will listen to him out of love and mutual respect. Philippians 1 begins with a warm greeting,

filled with gratitude for the Philippians' partnership in the Gospel, and a prayer for their spiritual growth and love to abound in knowledge and discernment.

Even in his imprisonment, Paul views his chains not as a hindrance but as an opportunity to advance the Gospel. His words reflect a profound understanding that both life and death can serve as avenues to glorify God. This perspective shapes much of his message to the Philippian church, as he encourages them to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel, despite the challenges they face. In verses 27-30, the focus of this reflection, Paul offers a stirring exhortation: he urges

the Philippians to live lives that reflect the Gospel's call, standing firm in unity and remaining unshaken by persecution. He frames suffering for Christ not as a burden but as an essential part of the Christian journey. This call to live worthily of the Gospel resonates deeply across time, as it speaks not only to apostles and church leaders but to all believers. Every Christian, regardless of role—be it apostle, prophet, pastor, or teacher—is called to live a life that reflects the transcendent meaning of being a bearer of God's image.

Integrity in Action

Consider the story of David, a young man working at a large company, known for his integrity and deep Christian faith. One day, his boss asked him to manipulate financial records to make the company appear more successful. Many employees complied without hesitation, but David's conscience was troubled. As a devout Christian, he knew this was wrong, even though refusing could cost him his job. His colleagues tried to persuade him, saying, "It's just business"

and that he should set aside his personal beliefs to advance in his career. In the midst of this struggle, David remembered the words of Philippians 1:27: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." This verse became his guiding light, and he chose to refuse the unethical request, explaining that he could not compromise his values for the sake of financial gain. His decision was met with mockery, and he faced a period of isolation at work. Yet, despite the opposition, David found peace in knowing he had acted in accordance with his faith.

Months later, an unexpected audit exposed fraudulent activities within the company, leading to the firing of several employees, including David's boss. David's integrity was recognized, and he was promoted to a higher position, his leadership marked by honesty and ethical behavior. David's story illustrates the truth that standing firm in one's faith may lead to temporary hardship, but ultimately, integrity prevails. His decision to live a life worthy of the

Gospel, even in the face of opposition, not only honored his beliefs but also opened doors for greater opportunities. David's story invites us to reflect: How often do we fail to uphold our faith and integrity when placed in difficult situations? Paul, writing to the Philippians from a Roman prison between A.D. 60 and 62, was in chains, yet his letter overflows with joy and encouragement. His message to the believers in Philippi, despite his own suffering, was one of gratitude, love, and unwavering confidence. In Philippians, Paul describes the sacrifices he made for the sake of Christ, and in doing so, he challenges us to examine our own lives. Are we living in a manner worthy of the Gospel's call? Paul's exhortation to the Philippians remains a powerful reminder for us today: whether in moments of trial or triumph, we are called to reflect the values of the Gospel. To live worthily of this call means embracing a life of integrity, faithfulness, and unwavering commitment to Christ, even when the path is difficult. As we journey through our own challenges, we can take heart from Paul's words, knowing

that our faith, when lived out fully, has the power to transform not only our lives but the lives of those around us.

Concrete in Our Conduct (v. 27)

I chose the word “concrete” to emphasize the concept of being solid, unwavering, and unshakeable, similar to the firmness of concrete. This idea closely aligns with Paul's call to “stand firm.” In Philippians 1:27, the phrase “conduct yourselves” is used metaphorically to mean “live.” However, unlike other instances where Paul uses the Greek word for “walk” to describe life (as in Philippians 3:17), here he uses a term that means “to be a citizen.” Paul may be addressing both their Roman and heavenly citizenships, reminding the Philippians of the privileges they enjoy as Roman citizens. Still, he points to a higher responsibility—that, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, they must live lives worthy of this eternal calling.

Paul's expectation for the Philippians, and for us today, is to

stand firm—concrete in our commitment to living out the Gospel. A self-reflective question we can frequently ask ourselves is: “Am I conducting myself in a manner worthy of the Gospel?” Many Christians falter when times get tough, downplaying their faith. However, for the Christian community, the Gospel is the determining factor of life, and we are called to live in a manner that reflects its worthiness. Paul exhorts the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit, a phrase often associated with warfare in the Bible. This verse urges us to be strong and courageous, resisting the devil's attacks with the power of God. As 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith.” Paul makes two important points here: First, stand firm with the same disposition of spirit; second, rely on the power of the one Holy Spirit to do so. Standing firm against spiritual opposition is only possible through God's power, which is available to us through the Holy Spirit. Paul isn't calling the Philippians to stand alone but to stand firm together,

as a community, reinforcing and supporting one another to face adversity without fear.

In one of our Christian Spirituality classes, Rev. Dr. Richard Howell highlighted this idea through 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, where Paul compares the church to a body with many members, each having a unique role and function. Paul writes, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” This metaphor e m p h a s i z e s t h e interconnectedness and interdependence of believers, teaching that spiritual growth occurs within the community. Ephesians 4:15-16 further stresses the importance of unity and mutual edification: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” These passages underscore the communal nature of spiritual growth, reminding us that living out the Gospel's call involves not just reverence for God but also a commitment to others. To live in the Spirit with consistency, in unity as a community, is a vital expression of the Gospel.

Paul continues, saying, “and in no way be alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and this too, from God.” Another translation states, “without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.” This leads us to the next important theme: courage in the face of persecution.

Courage in the Face of Persecution (vs. 28-29)

If you were imprisoned for a crime you didn't commit, what would you write to your friends? Paul's letter to the Philippians, written from a Roman prison, overflows with joy and courage. It shows us that standing for truth, even amid persecution, reflects the power of God, and the world takes notice when we stand firm in faith despite opposition. Paul knew that Christ's resurrection declared Satan's defeat, which is why he can confidently say, “whatever happens, stand strong!”

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Life isn't worth living until you have found something worth dying for.” This echoes Paul's declaration in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Living a life of purpose and significance is part of our call as followers of Christ. But standing for Christ often brings opposition. Paul encourages us not to let the fear of persecution deter us from living boldly for Him. A life worthy of the Gospel is marked by perseverance.

How do we respond when God allows difficulties in our lives—things we didn't ask for or expect? It's easy to be thankful when life is going well, but do we also thank God for hardships? Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, teaches us that suffering is a precious gift from God. He points out that suffering is part of God's gracious plan, just like salvation. The Greek word “charizomai” means to graciously bestow as an expression of love, and this includes suffering, which molds us into Christ's likeness and glorifies God.

Jesus himself said, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Suffering isn't joyful in itself, but God uses it to deepen our relationship with Christ and bring Him glory. Following Christ comes with a cost—conflicts, personal attacks, and challenges—but through love and obedience, we learn the true cost of discipleship.

Consistent in Leading an Exemplary Life (v. 30)

The consistency here refers to living an exemplary life, one that is worthy of the Gospel. This consistency comes only through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In urging the Philippians to endure suffering and oppression, Paul wasn't asking them to do anything he hadn't already done himself. He called them to unite with each other and with him, seeing suffering for their faith as a privilege that glorifies Jesus. This message is just as relevant today, especially when we're tempted to compromise or conform to things that don't reflect the truth of the Gospel. Instead, we are called to take a firm stand in our faith by

consistently walking with the Lord.

Paul emphasizes this unity in their shared struggle for the Gospel. When he speaks of "experiencing the same conflict," he is telling them that they are undergoing the same suffering he is. Paul aims to encourage them by reminding them that they are on the same team, facing the same challenges. He then points to his own example, saying, "which you saw in me." This refers to the time when the Philippians saw Paul endure hardships on his missionary journey in Acts 16. Despite being slandered, mobbed, flogged, and imprisoned, Paul remained firm and consistent in his walk with the Lord. His life was an example of unity, faith, and courage even in the face of persecution and trials, demonstrating what it means to live out the Gospel. The real question is: are we living Christ-centered lives that unite us, or are we driven by self-centeredness that divides us?

Conclusion

What then is the takeaway for us?

Some suffer more for their faith than others—cut off from family, isolated from society, or losing friends, while for our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, the cost may even be their lives. As we reflect on today's message, let's remember the three key points: First, *Concrete* (v. 27) – standing alone can lead to fear and intimidation, but as a community, we need each other. When oppression comes, especially when it intensifies, we must stand firm together, unified in living out the Gospel. Second, *Courage in the face of persecution* (vs. 28-29). And third, *Consistency* (v. 30). John Piper, in his book *Desiring God*, writes, “We do not choose suffering simply because we are told to, but because the One who tells us to describes it as the path to everlasting joy. He beckons us into the obedience of suffering, not to demonstrate the strength of our devotion to duty, but to manifest, in childlike faith, the

infinite preciousness of His all-satisfying promises.”

So, if a life worthy of the Gospel's call, as outlined by Paul in Philippians 1:27-30, involves these three points, are we truly living it? Have we allowed the gift of grace to transform our hearts? Does our life reflect the Gospel in a way that reveals God's love to the world? If yes, praise God. If not, it's time to decide—are we ready to live a life that is truly worthy of the Gospel's call?



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Give Me Neither Poverty Nor Riches

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Leonard Ravenhill, an English Christian evangelist once stated “If Jesus had preached the same message that ministers preach today, He would never have been crucified.” This is true of contemporary preachers as well. In an attempt to avoid offending their congregation, many ministers do not condemn sin. They try to refrain from preaching on topics such as suffering, self-denial, sacrifice, etc. Today, many preachers are abandoning “sound doctrine” and teaching what the “itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3). Throughout history, the Christian Church has always witnessed aberrant teachings within its ranks. One such teaching that has become extremely popular in the last few

decades is the 'prosperity gospel' or the 'health and wealth gospel.'

One of the most controversial teachings of today's 'prosperity gospel' is their undue emphasis on material prosperity. This teaching has drawn sharp criticism from several churches and Christian leaders all over the world. The traditional teaching of the church for several centuries has been that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). However, the members of the churches where the 'prosperity gospel' is being taught are promised riches, debt-free lives, and 'wealth transfer,' if only they give generously. Since many people in our world face financial difficulties or are in debt, it is

natural that they throng the churches where financial prosperity is promised. The proponents of the 'prosperity gospel' promise their congregation that they can live like the "King's kids," never lacking anything.

However, the Bible does not promise that God's people will always enjoy material prosperity. The Old Testament shows that God promised wealth to his people as a part of his covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 26:2-4; 28:13-15). Yet, the Old Testament laws and regulations prevented the Israelites from hoarding excessive wealth (Exod. 22:25-27; Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:26-28). Moreover, the Israelites had an obligation to share their wealth by providing for the poor and the distressed (Num. 15:15; Deut. 14:28-29). The Old Testament also demonstrates that sometimes even the righteous face poverty and sickness (Job 1:13-19). Although the Old Testament generally views material blessings as a sign of God's favor, it also admits that even the wicked can become prosperous through sinful means

(Ps. 73). The Old Testament even warns against the perils of riches (Prov. 23:4-5; Eccl. 5:8-17).

The New Testament focuses more on eternal riches rather than earthly possessions. It indicates that Jesus and many of his disciples were not very affluent (Lk. 2:21-24; Mt. 8:20). Jesus reiterates the Old Testament concern for the needy and destitute in his teachings (Mt. 25:31-46). The early Christians paid heed to the teachings of Christ and took the responsibility of taking care of the poor seriously (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-5:11). Apostle Paul warns against the temptations of riches and encourages generous giving (Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 6:5, 9-11; 2 Cor. 8 & 9). The Epistles condemn all kinds of covetousness and greed (Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:2; Jude 11). Overall, the New Testament stresses that one should work towards storing up treasures in heaven rather than striving for earthly wealth (Mt. 6:19-20). So, God never promises that he will always prosper his children financially.

We need to affirm that God does

meet the needs of his people and sometimes even blesses them financially. However, wealth should not be the focus of believers. The Bible also emphasizes self-denial, sacrifice, contentment, and suffering for the sake of the gospel. These aspects are not taught adequately by the proponents of the 'prosperity gospel.' Moreover, Jesus does not teach us to seek material prosperity. Rather, he exhorts us to consider the cost of being his disciple (Lk. 14:25-34). God does bless his followers so that they can be a blessing to others. However, one should not seek God merely for material prosperity. Even if a believer has to experience poverty due to persecution or any other unavoidable situation, he or she should be content and remain faithful to God realizing that God himself is our inheritance and joy!

While it is not true that God wants every Christian to prosper materially, it is equally not true that God wants his people to live in abject poverty throughout their lives. In denouncing the teaching on material prosperity, we should be careful not to advocate

poverty as a means to achieve godliness. The Bible does not teach that Christians should live an ascetic life. Rather, the Bible encourages a strong work ethic (2 Thess. 3:10; Eph. 4:28). God expects his people to work hard and support their families (1 Tim. 5:8). Scripture teaches that Christians should give generously (2 Cor. 9:6). In fact, generous and sacrificial giving is a good antidote for greed and covetousness. Furthermore, Scripture also tells us that we need to be content with what we have (Php. 4:11-13). The Bible does not encourage limitless greed which some of the modern proponents of the 'prosperity gospel' seem to be advocating. Since the Bible repeatedly warns against riches, it is advisable to seek neither poverty nor riches (Prov. 30:8-9). I think that Proverbs 30:8-9 offers an excellent alternative to the 'prosperity gospel' teaching. Preachers and teachers of the Word must strive to maintain balance in their teaching on wealth. Instead of incessantly working up our faith to become rich, we must first seek God's kingdom and his righteousness

(Mt. 6:33), strive to know God (Php. 3:10), love him and people (Mk. 12:30-31), be transformed into the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29), and make him known to the ends of the earth (Mt. 28:18-20). This is our great calling. May we press on towards this glorious goal!



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Journey Through Disappointment, Faith, and God's Plan

Mrs. Sabreena Benjamin

Introduction

Moses' life began amidst crisis and oppression. With the Hebrew people facing extermination under Pharaoh's decree, Moses was born into this perilous time. His mother, Jochebed, saved him by placing him in a basket on the Nile, trusting God's protection. Pharaoh's daughter discovered and adopted him, naming him Moses, meaning "drawn out of the water" (Exodus 2:2-3). This act of providence was the start of a divine plan.

Raised in the Egyptian palace, Moses retained his Hebrew identity, influenced by early teachings from his mother. At 40, he acted impulsively by killing an Egyptian who was beating a

Hebrew slave, leading to his flight from Egypt (Exodus 2:12). His subsequent years in Midian as a shepherd were essential for his preparation. This period of humility and dependence on God set the stage for his later role.

At 80, Moses encountered God in a burning bush, receiving a call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:11-12). Despite initial doubts, Moses embraced his mission. His life, despite personal failures and not entering the Promised Land, remained significant. His story, underscored in Deuteronomy 34:10 and Matthew 17:3, illustrates how God uses ordinary people for extraordinary purposes, fulfilling His promises in His perfect timing.

Moses in Egypt: Planned by God

Moses' life began in the midst of crisis and oppression. The Jewish people, once welcomed in Egypt due to Joseph's influence, had become a threat to the new Pharaoh. To curb their growing numbers, Pharaoh decreed that all male Hebrew babies be thrown into the Nile River. It was during this dark time of genocide that Moses was born, and his mother, Jochebed, recognized something extraordinary about him. She hid Moses for three months to protect him, and when she could no longer conceal him, she placed him in a waterproof basket in the Nile, trusting in God's protection. Pharaoh's daughter discovered the baby, adopted him, and named him Moses, meaning "drawn out of the water" (Exodus 2:2-3). This act of providence was the beginning of a divine plan.

Despite being raised in the Egyptian palace with access to the finest education and training, Moses retained the early teachings of his Hebrew heritage. Proverbs 22:6 emphasizes the importance of instilling values in children, a principle seen in Moses' life as the lessons from

his mother shaped his identity. At 40 years old, Moses witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave and, acting out of righteous anger, killed the Egyptian. His impulsive action, while motivated by justice, was premature and misguided, leading to his flight from Egypt (Exodus 2:12). This event marked the start of a period of exile and preparation that was crucial for Moses' future.

Moses' time in Midian, working as a shepherd, was a period of humbling and preparation for God's greater purpose. At 80 years old, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, calling him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Despite his initial doubts and feelings of inadequacy, Moses' obedience led him to confront Pharaoh and guide the Israelites through the wilderness. Even though Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land due to his disobedience, his legacy remained significant. Deuteronomy 34:10 highlights his unique relationship with God, and his story serves as a powerful reminder that God uses even our failures and disappointments for His greater purposes, teaching us to trust in His timing and plans.

Moses in the Wilderness: Shaped by God

The second phase of Moses' life was marked by a dramatic transition from the opulence of the Egyptian palace to the rugged and solitary wilderness. After fleeing from Egypt, where he had killed an Egyptian in defense of a Hebrew slave, Moses sought refuge in Midian. There, he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian. Moses' new life as a shepherd represented a significant shift from his previous status. Instead of living in luxury and wielding political influence, he now spent his days tending sheep, a role that seemed far removed from the leadership and grandeur of Egypt. This seemingly mundane existence, however, was a crucial phase in God's preparation of Moses for his future mission. For forty years, Moses lived in this desolate land, far from the limelight of royal life, learning to live simply and to depend on God's provision (Exodus 3:1).

During these years in the wilderness, Moses underwent profound personal transformation. The isolation and demands of shepherding in such a harsh environment taught him humility and patience. Psalm 25:9

reflects this period of Moses' life, emphasizing that God guides the humble and teaches them His ways. This phase was essential for Moses to develop a deep reliance on God, as he was stripped of his former status and forced to confront his own limitations. The wilderness experience was not merely a time of waiting but a time of intense spiritual growth and preparation. It was here that Moses learned to trust God's provision and guidance in ways that would become indispensable for his future role.

At the age of 80, when many would view such years as approaching retirement, Moses encountered a pivotal moment in his life. God appeared to him in a burning bush at Mount Horeb, revealing His plan to use Moses as the deliverer of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:11-12). Moses was initially filled with doubt and questioned his own ability to fulfill this divine call, asking, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God's response, "I will be with you," was a powerful reassurance that Moses was not alone in this task. This divine assurance highlighted that the years Moses

spent in the wilderness were not wasted but were crucial for equipping him with the faith and humility needed to lead the Israelites. Through this transformative encounter, Moses was prepared to embrace his role as God's chosen leader, ready to face the challenges ahead with a newfound trust in God's guidance and strength.

Moses' Leadership: God's Power Through Weakness (80–120 Years)

When Moses returned to Egypt at the age of 80, he did so with a profound sense of humility and readiness to follow God's instructions, despite his personal limitations and years of obscurity. At this stage of his life, Moses was no longer the prince of Egypt but a servant of the Most High, prepared to act on divine command. Alongside his elder brother Aaron, Moses approached Pharaoh with the weighty task of demanding the release of the Israelites from centuries of bondage. Exodus 7:7 captures their advanced ages as they undertook this monumental mission: "Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh." Their collective obedience to God's calling set the stage for a series of

dramatic and powerful events that would challenge the very fabric of Egyptian society.

God manifested His power through Moses in a series of ten devastating plagues that targeted the heart of Egyptian idolatry. Each plague was a direct affront to the gods worshiped by the Egyptians, showcasing the impotence of these false deities compared to the true God. For instance, the first plague, which turned the Nile into blood, was a direct judgment against Hapi, the god of the Nile, highlighting God's dominion over nature and Egyptian religion. As stated in Exodus 12:12, "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord." These plagues were not merely punitive but served as powerful demonstrations of God's authority and a prelude to the liberation of His people.

Despite the miraculous feats and leadership demonstrated by Moses, his journey was not without personal challenges and failures. During the Israelites' trek through the wilderness, Moses faced constant complaints and a

lack of faith among the people. In a moment of frustration, he disobeyed God's command by striking a rock to bring forth water, instead of speaking to it as instructed. This act of disobedience, driven by Moses' anger and frustration, led to a significant consequence. God declared that Moses would not enter the Promised Land because he failed to uphold God's holiness among the people (Numbers 20:12): "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'" Despite this, Moses' life and leadership were ultimately honored. In the New Testament, Moses appeared with Elijah during the Transfiguration of Jesus, signifying his enduring importance in God's redemptive plan (Matthew 17:3). This divine acknowledgment reaffirms that God's power and purpose are realized through those who, despite their imperfections, remain faithful and obedient to His will.

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God Exalts the Humble

Moses' life teaches us that God uses ordinary people for extraordinary purposes. Despite his struggles with doubt, fear, and impulsiveness, God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God does not require impressive qualifications but seeks those who are humble and reliant on Him. As 1 Corinthians 1:27 reminds us, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Moses' journey from a prince of Egypt to a servant leader exemplifies how God can work through those who

may seem inadequate by worldly standards to achieve His divine purposes.

The 40 years Moses spent in the wilderness were not a waste but a period of vital preparation. This time was crucial for Moses' personal growth and readiness to lead the Israelites. Wilderness seasons in our lives often serve as times of profound preparation, even if they feel challenging and unproductive. James 1:2-4 encourages us to "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." Just as Moses' wilderness experience equipped him for his role, our own trials and tribulations are opportunities for God to prepare us for greater things ahead.

Moses' life also underscores the importance of obedience to God. Despite his significant achievements, Moses learned that even small acts of disobedience could have serious consequences. His moment of frustration led to an act of disobedience, which ultimately prevented him from entering the Promised Land. This serves as a powerful reminder of the

necessity of aligning our actions with God's will. Proverbs 3:5-6 advises, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." Furthermore, God's timing is perfect, and while Moses' desire to see the Promised Land was fulfilled in a different form during the Transfiguration with Jesus, it reinforces that God's promises are fulfilled according to His divine timing, not ours, as stated in Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has made everything beautiful in its time."

Conclusion

Moses' life, beginning amid crisis and oppression, was intricately woven into God's plan. Born during a time of Hebrew genocide, his mother's courageous act of placing him in a basket on the Nile led to his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. This pivotal moment marked the start of a divine plan for Moses' future. Raised with the finest education in Egypt yet retaining his Hebrew heritage, Moses' early years were marked by a misstep that led to his flight to Midian. Here, in the wilderness, he experienced a period of

humble preparation, essential for his role as a leader. At 80, God called him from a burning bush, tasking him with leading the Israelites out of Egypt—a mission he undertook despite initial doubts.

Moses' leadership, characterized by God's power working through his weaknesses, brought forth dramatic miracles and plagues that showcased God's authority. Despite his significant achievements, Moses faced personal failures and consequences for disobedience. Yet, his life remains a testament to God's ability to use imperfect individuals for His extraordinary purposes. Moses' journey teaches us that God values humility and obedience over human qualifications. The trials and wilderness experiences in our lives are not in vain but serve as vital preparation for our future roles. Through Moses' story, we

are reminded to trust in God's perfect timing and align our actions with His will, knowing that He fulfills His promises according to His divine plan.



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OUR SEPARATED BRETHREN

Rev. Kuruvillea Chandy

Ever since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Roman Catholic Church has regarded other Christians as “separated brethren.”

But what is it that separates us? To answer this question, we need to go back to the roots of the separation, which was the Reformation that began in Germany with Martin Luther taking a stand against the malpractices prevailing in the Roman Catholic Church then. It was never Luther's intention to break away from the Roman Catholic Church, but he was forced to flee from the church when his life was threatened.

Grace Alone, Faith Alone

Two watchwords of the Reformation were “*sola gratia, sola fide*” (by grace alone, by faith alone). These watchwords have

reference to the doctrine of salvation. The Reformers insisted that we are saved by God's grace alone. We are not saved by good works—neither by our own nor anyone else's. Salvation is the fruit of God's grace and the only way to receive what is of grace is to just accept it through faith.

The context for this insistence was that to collect money to rebuild St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, the popes of that period had decided to sell special “indulgences.” People who were worried about the afterlife could ensure they escaped purgatory by buying extra merit from a treasury where the excess merits of saints and martyrs were supposedly stored. Only popes and their representatives had the authority to access this treasury of merit and only they could release the merits in favour of

people who pleaded the indulgence or favour of the church. People could even do this on behalf of departed loved ones so that they could escape the torments of purgatory.

The most aggressive salesman of these indulgences in Germany was a monk named Tetzel. He had a sales jingle that would put to shame the advertising agencies of our day:

*The moment your coin in
my chest rings,
that moment your loved
one's soul from purgatory
springs.*

Luther was appalled and angered by the crass materialism. He preached stridently against the sale of indulgences and the notion that salvation could be bought. He went further and wrote 95 theses against indulgences and nailed them to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517. The next day was All Saints' Day. People, who came to church, read it, copied it and distributed it, rejoicing at Luther's boldness. The then Pope saw that it threatened his authority and the church's teachings. Luther was summoned to stand trial in Rome, but since the German ruler Frederick was protective of

Luther, the trial took place in Germany.

Scripture Alone

Martin Luther was asked to recant his errors. Luther said, "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen." Luther asserted that they were not errors, but the truths revealed in God's Word. His accusers appealed to the traditions of the church, to which Luther countered with what became another watchword of the Reformation, "*Sola Scriptura*" (Scripture alone). The doctrines of the Church, he said, had to find their basis in Scripture alone, and not infallible, man-made traditions though they may have been held for centuries.

While Roman Catholicism has consistently held the view that Scripture and tradition are both the sources for the beliefs and practices of the Church, it would be difficult to assert that they do not hold the doctrine of salvation by grace. In theory, they do believe in the doctrine of grace. Their practices however do not fit in with the doctrine of justification by faith. The prescription of penance promotes among the laity the notion that salvation is

earned through the performance of good works. However, there have always been proponents of salvation by grace in the Roman Catholic stream. The gospel of grace was never lost entirely. For instance, Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations* is Christocentric and stresses grace.

The Augsburg Confession, as the first Protestant confession of faith, symbolises the breach between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Martin Luther's fellow reformer Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) penned it, drawing on earlier Lutheran statements of faith. As early as 1974, the idea was first advanced that the Roman Catholic Church should "recognize" the Augsburg Confession. It received wider attention when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later on became Pope Benedict XVI, took up the possibility of a "Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession or, more correctly, of recognizing the Augsburg Confession as Catholic." In 1980 Pope John Paul II went to Germany on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. Imagine that! The Pope went to commemorate a confession of faith that memorializes the division

between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Under Pope John Paul II, in 1997, the Roman Catholic Church signed a "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" with the Lutheran Church. It declares that the old condemnations no longer apply. The Reformation wounds seem to have been healed. Biblical studies leading up to Vatican Council II, and the Council itself provided the impetus for Roman Catholic dialogues with other Christians.

Today, a book that is influencing key persons in the Evangelical world (e.g. Dallas Willard, Larry Crab, Michael Card, Michael W Smith) is *The Ragamuffin Gospel* written by the seventy-year-old Brennan Manning, a former Franciscan priest, who still keeps his connection with the Roman Catholic Church, but does not pray to Mary.

Veneration of Mary

While those like Manning, who have had a conversion experience, don't pray to Mary, most Roman Catholics do. The veneration of Mary and the saints is essential to the practice of Roman Catholicism. Most Catholics argue that they do not pray to her but honour her and only ask her to pray for them. But that *is* praying. They pray to Mary

(and the saints) to pray for them. They want Mary et al to mediate with the Lord Jesus on their behalf. It is ridiculous to suggest that there is a need for someone to stand between us and the God who came so close to us as to take upon Himself our humanity, our sinfulness and our condemnation. The notion that anyone else can mediate between God and us goes totally against the biblical doctrine that there is only one mediator between God and humans, the man Jesus Christ (1 Tim.2:5). Thus, the watchword, “*Solus Christus*” – Christ alone is Saviour.

Moreover, the veneration of Mary is nothing short of worship, which is something that we are to offer to God alone. The words used in addressing Mary manifest adoration. For instance, when the Roman Catholic prays, “Hail Mary, full of grace...Blessed are you...” it is similar to the words of worship offered to God in the Psalms and the apocalyptic scenes captured for us in the book of Revelation.

The cult of Mary has grown steadily, not just in numbers, but also in increasing Mary's role in the salvation of the faithful. What the Bible says about Jesus alone, they say about Mary, and are bent

on attributing more and more of what is divine power to her. Many Roman Catholics regard Mary, the mother of Jesus, as “Co-Redemptrix (Co-redeemer), Mediatrix (Mediator) of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God.” Sadly, even the much-idolised late Mother Teresa held this view. For a long time the terms “mediatrix” and “co-redemptrix” have been applied to Mary by some Roman Catholics. There were some attempts to make their use official at Vatican II. There were, however, dissenting voices raised against that.

During his pontificate, John Paul II had asked a commission of twenty-three Mariologist scholars to study the proposal for the new dogma. As those who focus on Mary in all their theological reflections, they were most likely to approve of the matter. Instead, by a vote of 23 to nothing, the commission unanimously advised the Pope not to do it. Rene Laurentin, the French theologian and specialist on Mary, strongly opposes the dogma for being unscriptural and offensive to the doctrine of Christ's uniquely redemptive death.

Transubstantiation

Roman Catholics believe that at

Communion services, ordinary bread when consecrated, becomes the actual body of Jesus Christ and the wine becomes the actual blood of our Lord. This doctrine of transubstantiation is another doctrine that separates Protestants and Roman Catholics. But the bread remains bread, and the wine remains wine, even after they have been consecrated, whether in a Roman Catholic Church or a Protestant one. The bread doesn't turn into meat and the wine doesn't turn into blood.

There can be no veneration of the communion elements among Protestants. On the other hand, Roman Catholics do venerate the communion elements. They even have a feast to idolise the communion elements – the Feast of Corpus Christi. At this feast, communion bread is taken in procession after the communion service to display their adoration of the bread.

Apart from the fact that no such thing as transubstantiation happens, Protestants reject this view of the Communion, focussing on the words of Christ, “Do this in remembrance of me.” The bread and the wine only serve as memory aids. They remind us that just as food and

drink sustain our physical bodies, Jesus is the spiritual nourishment for our souls, and that just as the food and drink must be ingested to do any good, so too must the Lord Jesus be received into our hearts.

Even while serving as pastor of non-Anglican churches, whenever I administered the Lord's Supper, I said the words of the Anglican Communion Service to the participants: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ: take, eat and feed on Him in your hearts, by faith, with thanksgiving.” To emphasise the importance of the words I would dramatically pause while saying, “feed on Him” / “in your hearts” / “by faith” / “with thanksgiving”. I believe that that ancient wording from Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* captures the essence of what is involved in Communion. Communion takes place in the heart, not in the mouth.

One of the terms used to describe the Communion service is “Eucharist.” The word comes from the Greek *eucharisteo*, which means, “I thank you.” The Communion service is a thanksgiving service. When people give thanks, they recall experiences that they are grateful for. Followers of Christ call to

memory the fact that through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, they have been saved from bearing the consequences of their sinfulness and through the power released by the Lord living in their lives, they are able to conquer their tendency to sin. They feel gratitude when they think of their Lord. If the essence of Christian theology is grace, it follows that the essence of the Christian ethic is gratitude.

Papal Infallibility

This is the final major point of divergence. We must not think that the Roman Catholic insists that the Pope is always infallible. Rather, he is supposed to be infallible only when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, “for the church”. The question is whether even this could be true of a mere mortal. History records the fallibility of popes. Some were downright immoral, and one was insane while in office. Could what they pontificated have infallibility?

Roman Catholics insist that Peter was the first Pope even though there is no evidence whatever for this claim. If he was pope, all others were not made in his mould. He was no celibate, nor did he exercise the kind of hierarchical authority that popes have. Monarchical hierarchy was alien to the Early Church. There

were no bishops, leave alone a pope.

This notion that Peter was a pope derives from two sayings of our Lord. When Peter confessed that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God”, the Lord said to Peter: “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matt 16:18-20).” Did Jesus mean that Peter would be the foundation on which the entire Church would be built?

In Greek, what Jesus said translates this way: “You are *Petros* and on this very *petra*, I will build my church.” If our Lord had meant that Peter himself was to be the foundation, He would not have used a word different from the new name he had given him, but would have said, “You are *Petros*, and it is on *you Petros* that I will build my church.” While Jesus called Simon *Petros* (masculine gender), Jesus said that He would build His Church on this *petra* (feminine gender), the mother lode. Chrysostom, Origen, Eusebius and Ambrose are recognised by the Roman

Catholic Church as Church Fathers. They held the view Jesus was saying Jesus would build His Church on the confession that Jesus is the Son of God, for Jesus Himself is the Rock (1 Cor.10:4), the foundation of the Church (3:11) and after Christ, all the apostles together, not just Peter alone, form the foundation (Eph.2:20).

Points of Separation& Unity

These are the distinctions between “us and them”. We cannot ignore them or disregard them. If we set them aside, we would only be pretending unity.

In summary, let's affirm:

- the ultimate and final authority of the Scriptures – sola scriptura,
- acknowledge the work of Christ alone as sufficient for redemption – solus Christus,
- recognize that salvation is by grace alone – sola gratia,
- through faith alone – sola fide, and
- seek to do all things for God's glory – soli Deo gloria.

What then do we hold in common? We could start with Jesus. In the words of the Apostles' Creed, Roman Catholics and Protestants assert:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

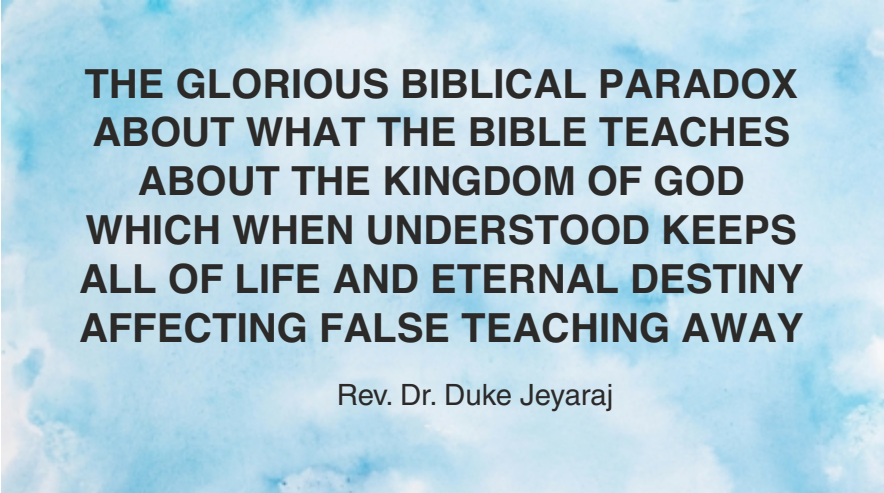
creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.



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THE GLORIOUS BIBLICAL PARADOX ABOUT WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHICH WHEN UNDERSTOOD KEEPS ALL OF LIFE AND ETERNAL DESTINY AFFECTING FALSE TEACHING AWAY

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

There is a glorious paradox concerning the Kingdom of God which will come to the fore when we study ALL what the Bible says about it. This essay deals with this.

There are 4 things that every believer must grapple with as long as they are on this side of eternity: defilement, disease, death, and demonic attack. What the Bible teaches about the Kingdom of God is closely connected to these four. Let me first start with Demonic Start and go to the other three areas:

DEMONS & THE ALREADY BUT NET YET ASPECT OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Matthew 12:28 says that the devils are cast out by the Spirit of God. When this happened in

Jesus' ministry the Kingdom of God has been established and Satan has been defeated. When Jesus died on the Cross the Devil was “already” defeated and shamed on the Cross. Read Colossians 2:13-15. Jesus defeated the devil on the Cross. But the final defeat of the Devil is still in the 'not yet' category. It is pending. The devil is still active deceiving people and nations (1 Pet. 5:8). “Already but not yet theology” tells us that the work of God is inaugurated in His First Coming but completed in the Second Coming. Matthew 25:31-34 speaks about the separation of people and nations just as the shepherd-King (this is surely talking about Jesus) divides the sheep and goats (judges both believers and non-believers). God will complete the

establishment of the kingdom of God after the Second Coming. So, His kingdom is still coming, in one sense. Luke 17:21 says the Kingdom (of God) is (already) in you! But Luke 23:42,43 is a reference to the “not yet” kingdom. The dying thief, in that passage, says “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom” and Jesus responds “You will be with me in Paradise today.” The Dying thief rightly had the 'already but not yet' theology and made the right request. Jesus did NOT tell him: “What rubbish are you talking about. I have already come into my Kingdom, 100%. What do you mean 'when you come into your Kingdom?' implying something I need to do in the future?” Mark 13:26 and Mark 14:62 talks about the coming Kingdom of Jesus in power by referring to Jesus coming in power in the clouds! Both these verses use the phrase 'you will see' implying that there is a Kingdom that is to come!

Satan is still active and can cause us harm if we are not alert and will only be sent to hell after the Second Coming of Jesus [Rev. 19:11 (Second Coming), Rev. 19:20 (hell for the miracle-working False Prophet and Antichrist) and Rev. 20:10 (hell for the Devil)].

Note that we must not get carried away by false teachers who say, “Look at my miracles!” because the ultimate False Prophet, one who is part of the False Trinity will also work miracles!

Let's next see how the 'Kingdom of God already there' and 'Kingdom of God not yet there' biblical understanding helps us to grasp what the Bible says about sin (defilement).

DEFILEMENT (SIN) AND THE ASPECT OF THE ALREADY BUT NOT YET OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Thanks to the work done on the Cross during his first coming, Jesus gave us power over defilement; he made us holy (1 John 1:7-9; Heb. 9:14). Being cleansed from defilement does not allow us the permission to use abusive words or get back to our pet sin, say porn-watching. We must gain victory over every kind of sinful habit (1 John 3:5-6).

The Bible reiterates about 300 times that Jesus is coming again. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that Jesus has already made us righteous. But 1 John 1:8 ('If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us') states we are not righteous. If we claimed that, we

are lying, this verse says. James 3:2 says that we (believers) stumble in many ways. It is a paradox. We are “already” holy, but “not yet” holy! This is what is called the 'already but not yet' theology – a theology that we must take time to understand! If we don't understand this theological truth which is soundly biblical, we will get into dangerous false teachings!

Only after the Second Coming (which takes place in Revelation 19:11), in the consequently created New Heavens and Earth will there be complete absence of sin (Rev. 21:27, 'Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life').

So, till the Second Coming, we must keep on putting to death the acts of the flesh empowered by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). So, in this sense, we are already holy but not yet holy!

DISEASE AND THE ASPECT OF THE ALREADY BUT NOT YET OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Let's next see how the 'Kingdom of God already there' and 'Kingdom of God not yet there' biblical understanding helps us to

grasp what the Bible says about disease.

Even though God has worked out the solution on the Cross, the provision for our healing, some do not get healed for mysterious reasons. Isaiah 53:5 – With His stripes we are healed. 1 Peter 2:24 - By whose stripes ye were healed. Yes, after the first coming Jesus made provision for our healing at the Cross. However, for some mysterious higher reason not all of us are healed here and now. 2 Timothy 4:20 - Paul left his fellow labourer Trophimus at Miletus sick, even though he had healed sick and possessed people, with handkerchiefs/ aprons.

Matthew 8:16,17 records that Jesus healed ALL that were sick in a particular area fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:5. This is in line with Exodus 23:25 which says, “I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.”

My maternal aunt, **Mrs. Florence Williams**, was a teen-ager when **Billy Graham** preached in Palayamkottai in South India in 1956. She told me that she knows of people who were healed when they merely touched the radios which broadcast his simple

gospel message where there was no focus on healing! But we know Billy Graham died at the age of 99, his body and memories ravaged by Parkinson's disease. Grant Wacker writing for the *Washington Post* on 21 February 2018 wrote thus about Billy Graham's declining health: 'Aging quieted his trademark machine-gun sermons into talks that seemed more like fireside chats. He readily admitted that he "yelled" less, and that he had come to favor less demanding indoor auditoriums over the outdoor stadiums that had propelled him to international fame. Yet, serious illness took its inevitable toll. He collapsed while speaking in Toronto but climbed out of a hospital bed several days later to preach to a Sky Dome record crowd of 73,500 on the final night of an evangelistic crusade. More significant was the Parkinson's disease (later diagnosed as hydrocephalus). "You know what happens when you get Parkinson's? Your handwriting gets illegible and your sermons longer," he quipped. But his wife, Ruth Bell Graham, saw things more soberly. "This Parkinson's is no laughing matter," she judged. "Overnight he has become an old man."

WHY INSTANT HEALING DID NOT HAPPEN IN THE BIBLE NARRATIVES

Paul, the author of many New Testament books, had a thorn in his flesh – some kind of ailment causing pain. He pleaded three times with God to take it away. But it remained. God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9). 1 Peter 2:24 reiterates we were healed by His stripes. But he still had to deal with the thorn in his flesh. If 1 Peter 2:24 means that we cannot be sick as believers, Paul would not have had the thorn in the flesh, staying on. The thorn remained, however. It was not removed miraculously. So, we conclude that believers can be sick, for reasons best known to God. John 9, the first few verses, indicate this happens for the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 12:7 indicates this happens so that we do not become conceited. When believers think, "We are gods!" that is being conceited. But I am human. I depend on God and others and this ushers in a beautiful, mutual dependence, and a spirit of teamwork. The area in which I am weak may be the strength of another person. There is a great spiritual blessing in our fragile spiritual existence!

While 1 Peter 2:24 teaches that

Jesus has 'already' made provision for our healing, passages such as Romans 8:23 (which says that we await redemption of our bodies) teach that we are 'not yet' healed. After the Second Coming of Jesus (recorded in Revelation 19), there will be a time when there will be no more pain – no more disease (Rev.21:4).

We have talked about Defilement in terms of the already but not yet paradigm. We have talked about Disease in terms of the already but not yet paradigm. Now to the next topic – Death.

DEATH AND THE ASPECT OF THE ALREADY BUT NOT YET OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Let's next see, how the 'Kingdom of God already there' and 'Kingdom of God not yet there' biblical understanding helps us to grasp what the Bible says about death.

There are 2 stages in the coming of Christ – the first coming and the second coming. If Jesus had planned to finish all his work about us (like defeating death) in the first coming itself, he would not have told that us that He is coming again. But he told us that he is coming again! **Jesus' First coming helps us overcome the**

'fear of dying' (Heb. 2:15). Jesus' Second Coming brings us to a period in which believers will overcome death itself (In Revelation 19, Second Coming of Jesus becomes a reality and in Revelation 21:4, the phrase 'no more death' is used to describe life in New Heaven and Earth). The fear of death is released, thanks to Jesus' work during his first coming. The first coming of Christ deals with one dimension of death but the second coming deals with death in all dimensions. Only post his second coming, we will receive a glorified, death-free, immortal body (1 Cor. 15:23; Phil. 3:20-21 says that our 'lowly' body – our sin-prone and disease-prone lowly body – will be transformed into Christ's glorious body – a body with no sin or sickness – when Jesus comes again). The reward for giving up all and loving Jesus supremely is “Eternal” life (a deathless life) and this blessing is only available in the “life to come” (Luke 18:30) – not before that! We have “already” overcome fear of death (Heb. 2:15) and but “not yet” experienced a total win over death as death is the last enemy which Christ will defeat “at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:23,26).

Balance Psalm 91:10 ('no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent') with Hosea 13:14 where the prophet who served Yahweh even before the first coming of Jesus happens, foretells the future time after Second Coming where-in a Psalm 91:10 kind of protection will be a 100% reality! Second-coming effect heralding Hosea 13:14 is quoted by Paul in second-coming heralding reality talking about 1 Corinthians 15:55 – "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" [we will become immortal (I Cor. 15:54) and will never ever die, have 100% victory over physical death (I Cor. 15:55) when Jesus comes again (I Cor. 15:23)]. In the absolute sense, Psalm 91:10 (no plague shall come near thy dwelling), will be ultimately true only in the New Heaven and Earth (Rev.21:4) post the Second Coming of Jesus (Rev. 19:11) and not before that in an absolute sense. While on earth, before the Second Coming, we can experience the 'first-fruits' of the promises found in passages like Psalm 91:10 (see Rom. 8:23). But the 'full-fruit' will come only after the Second Coming! What do you mean by 'first-fruits'? May I explain this via a personal story?

During the pandemic, one morning I felt that I had the Virus. But I prayed. And prayed. I did not even tell my family knowing they would fear the worst. Within an hour, I felt fine. God had healed me! Psalm 91:10 was a reality in my life. However, this did not mean, I can never ever die of a disease or an accident. I may die in such unfortunate circumstances. But once I reach heaven, I will have no disease or death. I would have graduated from receiving 'first-fruit' now to 'full-fruit' in the next life!



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The God of Hope

(Romans 15: 13)

Mr. Chacko Thomas

A few quotations to help us:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”[Rom 15:13]

“My Lord knows the way through the wilderness All I have to do is follow; Strength for today is mine all the way, and all I need for tomorrow is mine.” [An children's chorus.]

“... What hope does atheism offer to today's young people? [Ayaam Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim, turned an atheist who recently turned to Christ, challenging Richard Dawkins, the most famous atheist in the world. Taken from a debate on YouTube.]

Do I matter to God?

“On the train to Helsinki, Finland,

a young man came and sat next to Mr. Augustine Salins [1913 - 1985, an Indian Evangelist, Formerly with Ambassadors for Christ]. Having seen Augustine's photo in the newspapers, he had come to speak about his backslidden life. He had accepted Jesus as his Saviour at the age of 12. Later, he had a definite call to serve God full time, at the age 18. He had not however, been willing to obey.

“He explained to Augustine, how he had rebelled and over the years, he felt God had 'given him up' to follow his own ways, as in Romans 1:24-31. ...'Can one man on a speck of a plant in a speck of a solar system really mean anything to the Creator of the Universe? Surely, it is more plausible to believe that life was meaningless.'

“Augustine prayed for wisdom from above to speak to him. 'Do I matter to God? Does he care for me?' the young man pleaded.

“Augustine finally replied: 'For thirty-three years, God experienced in the flesh what it is to be like one of us. In the stories Jesus told, the lives he touched and healed, he answered for all time that perturbing question. Jesus said that angels rejoice when a single sinner repents.

“It is Jesus who gave God a face and that face is streaked tears because he understands each one of us and we are precious to Him. Peter, James, and John followed Jesus and watched him respond to a centurion who was grieving, an epileptic boy, a widow's dead son, and an old blind man. They learnt how God felt about suffering and sorrow. When his friend Lazarus died, 'Jesus wept'.

“Jesus took the form of a servant and came down to earth. He showed that the hand of God is a hand engraved with our individual names. He also showed that the hand of God is engraved with wounds, the scars, the cost for God loving us so much.

“The father's outstretched arms are always ready to welcome and embrace the repentant prodigal.”[Taken from the Biography of Mr. & Mrs. (Dr) Augustine Salins, by Dr Monica Salins Benjamin, published by IEM.] Yes, “Father's outstretched arms” are our hope.

Hopeful in Pilgrims Progress:

John Bunyan (1628-1688), his famous work, “The Pilgrim's Progress”, portrays a character called “Hopeful”. Named after another of the three theological virtues – hope. He becomes Christian's new companion after Faithful is martyred.

David French, in his “Life Lessons from Pilgrim Progress” comments, “after Faithful is martyred, the Christian undergoes a period of imprisonment before he is released and allowed to leave the Vanity Fair. He is accompanied on his journey to Celestial City by Hopeful. Hopeful assures Christian....

“The Christian life is not always easy, and for some it is very difficult from the very outset. Yet what gives us courage and strength to persevere is the hope that we have in Christ. Hope that springs out of having our sins

forgiven and entering into everlasting life – hope of an eternity with Christ and the blessed saints throughout the ages. It is a better hope than that of the world.”

What is hope?

Human hope: “A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. ...” Webster's dictionary.

Biblical hope: “Confidence in a future event; the highest degree of well-founded expectation of good; as a hope founded on God's gracious promises” Webster's dictionary.

The word “hope” is found more than 130 times in the Bible. Below are about fifteen places where the word appears. It is organised under five titles, making it easier to appreciate it. These are verses that we may want to make part of our praise and worship life.

The credit for this particular grouping goes to my friend and colleague, Roderick Harbottle. Rod Joined OM the same year as I did, but with a difference, besides being British, he joined OM in the UK on the day he graduated from Oxford with a degree in Law. He never turned

back, serving the Lord full time, making a difference for Jesus in the Muslim world, especially in the Turkic world.

“What is our hope?”

Rom 5:2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Eph 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Col 1:5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

Tit 1:2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.

Tit 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

“What is the basis of our hope?”

Col 1:5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

Mat 26:28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Tit 3:4-7 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, (5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, (7) so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

“Hope like an anchor.

Hebrews 6:13-20 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, (14) saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." (15) And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. (16) For people swear by something greater than

themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. (17) So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (19) We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, (20) where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

“The results of having hope.

Romans 5:4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

2Co 3:12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,

Hebrews 6:19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the

inner place behind the curtain,
Rom 5:2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

“The God of hope:

Rom 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

India Needs Christian Hope:

In fact, the whole world needs it. Billions of people in our world have a terrible state of existence, physically and spiritually. It is sad reality, and we as Christians should be concerned.

Someone has explained life as living in a multi-story building with no exits or stairways to go up. You are stuck on the floor you are born into. This is called hopelessness. It is all around us, much of it caused my human inhumanity. What hope does the poor, the oppressed, the disaster struck have?

Yet, there is hope. God has a mighty plan. The Lord Jesus

Christ offers hope to all who trust Him. He is able, to lift us up from a miry clay and set our feet on solid ground. The Bible is a book of hope, leading us to a “living hope”, “blessed hope”, “God of hope”. Christianity in general and Evangelical Faith in particular pulsates with hope.

You and I are God's arms today, to be stretched out, in God's power to bring hope to the hopelessness all around us. May the Lord grant it.



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Foundation for Christian Ministry-Part III

Ps. Grish Lal Tamta

Introduction

The foundation for Christian ministry was discussed in two parts in the previous articles in detail and talked about it from OT and NT perspective and its distinctiveness from other.

Now, let us learn that the foundation for ministry requires God's "CALLING" to minister and serve him and his people. The key to serve him is the "Love" for him and his people. It needs the leadership to lead the people to his kingdom and join his mission to establish his kingdom on earth as it is the heaven through the keys of love and service to others.

The meaning of the call and preparation of the Minister

The meaning of the call is to

invite, request, demand and to summon to a particular activity. But biblically, it is different in which God calls the people to take his message of salvation to the whole world in order to restore and reconcile the lost relationship to him. The root word of calling in Greek is Kaleo (κάλει) which means to call. In New Testament, the word is used for naming or sometimes inviting to share the joy of salvation (Math 22:1-2).

The call given by God to individuals on different way. Moses was called from abush, Isaiah had avision, Jeremiah got arevelation, and Paul heard his voice. So, there is no fixed pattern for call. But the call is to share salvation and service (Math 4:19)

to all humans. Since the sin entered the world through human, brought the humanity under curse and death which needed the restoration of relationship with God to live. The loving God in his infinite mercy made a plan to send Jesus and save humanity from eternal death by his sacrifice on the cross.

The call is given to share this with all nations of the earth to have salvation through Jesus Christ. Peter says all are called out of the darkness into the light of the world (1 Pet 2:9). In New Testament, he called all to share the salvation which is offered by Jesus Christ. The call requires steadfastness, discipling, walking worthy of his calling, pressing forward to achieve the goal given by Lord (Math 28:18-20). All those who believe in Jesus Christ, must serve God and his people and save them for eternity which is alone by his grace (Eph 2:8-10).

The special call to leadership

God has called all Christians, yet some are assigned a specific job in fulltime ministry to fulfil. Under specific call, some are called to be apostle, prophets,

evangelism, preacher and teacher (Eph 4:11). In fact, nothing like specific call of God for his high and worthy vocation because he sustains the called one, in every situation. Without such specific call, one should not get involved in the specific ministry because 96% of such called one are burnout and only 4 % left to sustain. In OT, God specifically called Moses (Exo 3:1-17), Isaiah (Isa 6:1-13) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-19) irrespective of age, place, and status, had some similarity in calling but it was specific. It was initiated by God, though they were reluctant, yet obeyed and assured the divine enablement. So, the specific call is like to be a Masoner or architecture whereas the general call is like to make a building.

Different names and functions of minister in New Testament

The names and functions of ministers are according to their work and responsibility. The minister is called “A Man of God” in 1Tim 6:11, “A messenger” in Malachi 2:7, “A pastor” in Eph 6:11, “A Bishop” or “overseer” or “church leader” in 1Tim 3:1 and “A superintendent” or “A presbyter”

in Acts 20:28. Some others are called Elders, Evangelists, and Teachers but all are involved to commit to the call of God.

Five types of Christian leaders that Paul lists

Paul listed five kinds of leaders like Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Preachers and Teachers to prepare God's people and edify them to serve so that the body of Christ may be built, in order to reach the *unity in faith* and the knowledge of his son Jesus Christ and become mature and attain in fulness of his likeness (Eph 4:11). These are the gifts of God to the church to teach and train people in his service organically.

The role of laity in the ministry

The New Testament primarily gives the picture of volunteer ministry including men and women like Tabitha, Priscilla, Aquila, Stephen, Philip even Paul was Laity who did most of the ministry and led them to Christ. The word in Greek (λαϊκός) is used as laity for those who were uneducated but the same not found anywhere in New Testament. It was used as the people of God (λαός). When the

church began to grow after Pentecost day, there arose persecution, as a result most of the believers scattered out of Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, and Cyrene telling the good news about Jesus Christ (Acts 11:19-21). They preached good news about Lord Jesus Christ and began social action helping one another and taking care of those who were in need.

All this was done by laity people and the role of the apostles was to investigate, teach, and lay hands on them. Initially, all were laity but during 2nd century, the term was used to distinct between laity and clergy in order to handle the Gnosticism and false teachings which led this Schism. But the facts remain the same that all are called to preach gospel. Bible says God has called fools to shame the wise and weak to shame the strong to the service of God (1 Cori 1:26-29). Unfortunately, the professionalism of preaching gospel has lost the vitality of Christian witnessing and serving as it was in the early church of first century.

Who is meant to do the ministry

The word Church is derived from Greek word ecclesia which means to call out or an assembly for some purpose. The root meaning of church is not building but the group of people. Paul says greet the church that is in your house (Rom16:5). It is the body of believers whose head is the Christ. The one who have accepted Jesus Christ as his personal saviour and Lord are to do the ministry or serve him. The Christian ministry is to go into the world and preach the gospel in the name of Jesus and in the great power of the holy spirit and open their eyes, deliver them from the darkness, release them from the power of Satan and bring them into the light and the power of the God to receive the forgiveness of their sin and have eternal life for the whole world till his second coming (Acts 26:18).

The specific call of the laity to leadership

The word Laity in New Testament is used for “the people of God” which means all are called to serve the master. Even Paul was laity and all other disciples were laity but then God called Paul to serve him by preaching to

gentiles. Phebe was a laity but God called her to be overseer. Stephen was laity who was called to help the apostles and Philip too was laity and called to lead and preach gospel to sorcerer and Ethiopian eunuch. God has no other plan than to call all which means “All” and preach gospel bring the people from darkness to the light.

The importance of preparing for ministry

The preparation is required in all kind of tasks, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Since the Christian ministry is a sacred, unique, demanding which needs genuine preparation thoroughly. The character and credibility of a person is more important because the character is the true measure for his spiritual power and will determine his worth to God for his service. The minister should strive to be like Christ character and grow in his likeness.

The qualities that are essential to do Christian ministry

The essential qualities to become effective minister and to do ministry are prayer life, importance of God's word,

character, credibility, integrity, discipleship, use of spiritual gifts servant heart, love and care for people.

The conditions of discipleship

The minister should follow Christ as his example and model to be his disciple and accept him as teacher and deny himself and carry his own cross (Math 16:24). But there are conditions to be the disciple of Jesus. A disciple denies himself in order to follow Christ and turns away from sinful ways and pleasures. Besides, a disciple required to control his desires and allows himself to be controlled by Christ and holy spirit and must be willing to bear the cross.

The prayer and the study of the word of God helps a person for ministry

Prayer and studying His word on daily basis, are the only way to have personal and intimate relationship with God. Through prayer, we commune with our heavenly father and receive his guidance, direction, strength, and power to do his ministry. Jesus always prayed to the father and took his guidance in the morning and then evening, he shared the

work he did for his glory (Mark 1:35-39).

Conclusion

The foundation for Christian ministry requires God's "CALLING" to minister and serve him and his people. The key to serve him is the "Love" for him and his people and obey him. The ministry is the way to join his mission to save the creation and establish his kingdom on earth as it is in the heaven. The sound knowledge of God's word and seeking him diligently and meditating upon his word brings success and prosperity (Josh 1:8). The prayer, word of God and fellowship are the three pillars of foundation for Christianity which helps the minister to be effective in his ministry for his glory. Amen.



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The Kingdom to Come

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

“The world is witnessing a resurgence of kingdoms, not in the traditional sense of history books, but as modern empires built on military and economic might. Daily headlines chronicle these rising powers, their influence extending far beyond borders and into our everyday lives.

While history offers countless examples of such conflicts, from the World Wars to the Cold War, one consistent truth emerges: wars end, casualties mount, and the ideologies they champion often fade into obscurity. Yet, their impact on societies endures, shaping our world today.

If we had had the opportunity to talk to our parents and

grandparents, they would have talked about the two world wars of the 20th century, the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and many others. But one thing is common among all; the wars ended, millions suffered and the people and the ideologies they were fought for have mostly vanished.

Throughout history, kingdoms have risen and fallen, their power and influence waxing and waning like the tides. The annals of time are replete with tales of once-mighty empires reduced to dust, their legacies fading into obscurity. This cyclical nature of human civilization underscores the inherent frailty of earthly kingdoms.

The crucifixion of Jesus can be understood as a collision of competing kingdom ideologies. On one hand, there was Caesar and the Roman Empire, which sought to maintain control and suppress any threats to its rule. Caesar's kingdom was rooted in power, authority, and the maintenance of order through military strength and political dominance. Any figure or movement that could be perceived as a threat to this control, especially one with a large following like Jesus, would be considered a danger to the Roman order.

Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, may have envisioned a different kind of kingdom. Many in Judea at the time expected a Messiah who would deliver them from Roman occupation, someone who would establish a political or militant kingdom that would restore Israel's national sovereignty. Judas could have been motivated by this desire for a worldly kingdom, one that would challenge Rome's authority and free his people from oppression.

In contrast, Jesus continually emphasized that His kingdom

was fundamentally different. He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world," (John 18:36) making it clear that His mission was not to overthrow earthly rulers or establish political dominance. Instead, Jesus was inaugurating a spiritual kingdom—one built on love, humility, and sacrifice. His kingdom was not founded on the principles of power or violence but on grace and truth, aiming at a transformation of hearts rather than a political revolution.

The misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus' kingdom among the people during His time can be attributed to several factors, rooted in cultural, historical, and theological contexts. The Jewish people were living under Roman occupation, and many were desperately hoping for a Messiah who would deliver them from foreign rule. Prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures had spoken of a coming Messiah, and many interpreted these prophecies as pointing to a political and military leader who would restore Israel's sovereignty. For example, they envisioned a king like David or a leader like Moses, who would lead a powerful uprising, expel the Romans, and reestablish

Israel as a strong, independent kingdom.

This hope for political liberation was so dominant that when Jesus spoke of the "kingdom of God," many assumed He meant a literal, earthly kingdom where He would reign as a political king. Even His closest disciples, like Peter, James, and John, initially believed in this more conventional view of a Messiah (Matthew 20:21). When suffering and oppression are here and now and often in your face, it is hard to wait for a kingdom that is to manifest in the distant future.

However, Jesus' kingdom was not about political power, territorial conquests, or social hierarchies. Instead, it was centered on the reign of God in people's hearts and lives. His focus was on spiritual renewal, calling people to repentance and a deeper relationship with God. He emphasized that His kingdom was about internal transformation rather than external political systems. In Luke 17:20-21, He taught that the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed with physical eyes but is "within" or "among" those who believe.

This spiritual nature of the kingdom explains why Jesus often refused to engage in political disputes or to take sides in the political struggles of His time. When asked about paying taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:21), Jesus responded by saying, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." This demonstrated that His concerns were not about challenging the Roman government directly but about calling people to live in a way that honours God. Even as Jesus talked about the future coming of the kingdom, and slowly, realisation dawned, many of his disciples still imagined that Jesus would return to earth in their lifetime and begin His kingdom reign and end their earthly misery.

Evangelicals believe that the Kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope. This "already, but not yet" understanding is central to evangelical theology. The idea is that the Kingdom of God is both "already" here and "not yet" fully realized. Christians believe that the Kingdom was inaugurated by Jesus during His earthly ministry and continues to be present

wherever God's will is done. However, they also anticipate the fullness of the Kingdom in the future, when Jesus will return and establish His reign completely, bringing an end to sin, suffering, and death. This "already, but not yet" perspective helps believers understand why the world still contains evil and brokenness while also seeing signs of God's kingdom at work in the church, acts of love, and justice.

Though today, no one talks of the Kingdom of God as a political one, the imprint remains. Liberation theology, which emerged in the mid-20th century, especially in Latin America, focuses on the belief that the Christian faith should address not only spiritual salvation but also social, political, and economic liberation for the oppressed. This understanding aligns with many key aspects of Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God, which centers on justice, love, and the holistic transformation of human life.

Liberation theology is rooted in the conviction that God has a special concern for the poor and the marginalized. The Kingdom of God, as preached by Jesus,

similarly emphasizes this. Jesus consistently prioritized the outcasts, the poor, and those on the fringes of society, teaching that the Kingdom belongs to them. For instance, in the Beatitudes, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3), and in Luke's version, He says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

Liberation theology echoes this focus, arguing that the Gospel calls Christians to actively stand in solidarity with the poor, advocating for their rights and working for their liberation from oppression. For liberation theologians, the Kingdom of God is not just a distant future hope, but a present reality that demands engagement in the struggle for social justice and equality.

Evangelicals generally emphasize the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God. While some Christian traditions focus on the social and political implications of the Kingdom, evangelicals typically prioritize its spiritual aspects. For them, the Kingdom is fundamentally about God's rule

in the hearts and lives of individuals. When people turn to Christ in faith and repentance, they enter the Kingdom and begin to live under God's reign.

This emphasis is often based on Jesus's statement, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), which evangelicals interpret as the internal transformation of believers by the Holy Spirit. In this view, the Kingdom manifests in personal conversion, spiritual growth, and the believer's pursuit of holiness.

Most Christians, of whatever persuasion view the Church as a tangible, albeit flawed reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth. They believe that the Church, as the body of Christ, is called to manifest Kingdom realities by being a community of love, unity, and service. In this understanding, the Church is not just a religious institution but a living embodiment of God's Kingdom, where believers work together to bring healing, justice, and hope to the world. Many denominations emphasize that the Church is called to be a "foretaste" of the future Kingdom, where people of all backgrounds are united in Christ.

For many of us who are not theologically trained, there is a sense that the Kingdom of God is mysterious and difficult to fully comprehend. Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom in parables, which left even His disciples puzzled at times. This sense of mystery continues for many of us who may understand that the Kingdom is both present and future, both spiritual and tangible, but also acknowledge that its fullness surpasses human understanding. Many accept that while they can live in the Kingdom now and work toward its realization, its true nature will only be fully understood when Christ returns.



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Report on the 70th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of India in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) hosted its 70th Annual Convention and Leaders Conference from September 17th to 19th, 2024, in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh. With over 200 participants from across India, this significant gathering expressed solidarity with the Church in the Bastar region, which has faced increasing persecution in recent years. The Church's presence in Bastar spans over 150 years, and tribal Christians have long been an integral part of the local culture. However, the rise of right-wing ideology and action in the region since the 1980s has challenged the social fabric and has particularly affected tribal Christians, who have lived for over a century in harmony with

their tribal sisters and brothers.

Theme: "Hope in Hardship"

The convention's theme, "Hope in Hardship" (Romans 5:3-4), resonated deeply with the participants as they reflected on their own experiences of suffering and hardship. Rev. Vijayesh Lal, General Secretary of EFI, delivered the keynote address on the opening day. He spoke about the biblical understanding of hope, emphasizing that even in the darkest times, Christians are called to choose hope, anchored in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Rev. Lal's message provided much-needed encouragement and set the tone for the rest of the convention.

Rev. Dr. Praveen Paul, Principal of the Caleb Institute of Theology, Delhi, led the daily Biblical Reflections from the book of Nehemiah, drawing lessons from the themes of rebuilding and restoration. His insightful studies were well received, providing participants with practical guidance for navigating their own challenges.

Key Messages from Resource Persons

Throughout the three days, various speakers addressed the participants, offering words of wisdom and encouragement:

- Rev. HDS Joel from Agra shared a biblical perspective on suffering and hardship, underlining the surety of Christian hope and the victorious nature of the Church, even in times of trial.
- Bishop Biswajit Pani from Bhubaneswar led a session on "Being Women and Men of Hope," urging believers to rise as bearers of hope in their communities.
- Dr. John Dayal spoke on building resilient communities of faith, emphasizing the importance of unity and strength in the face of persecution.

- Rev. Vijay Paul Emerson delivered a message titled "The God of Hope," encouraging participants to trust in God's unchanging character during difficult times.
- Rev. Sushil Tyagi from Delhi shared on "Endurance in Trials," offering practical advice for remaining steadfast in faith through adversity.

• EFI General Secretary, Rev. Vijayesh Lal, concluded the final day with a message calling participants to persevere in faith, reminding them to remain firm in their belief and to choose hope for the future despite the hardships they face.

Breakout Sessions

On the second day, participants engaged in breakout sessions, which provided a platform for focused discussions on key issues facing the Church today:

- Sharing Our Faith in a Changed Context by Rev. Sushil Tyagi
- Our Rights and Responsibilities by EFI's Religious Liberty Commission
- Hope Against Human Trafficking by Dr. Sanjuprabha Pani

- Sunday School Formation and Teaching by the Christian Education Department of EFI
- Grassroots Theological Formation and Networking by Rev. Issac Dutta

These sessions were interactive and provided attendees with practical tools to strengthen their ministry and outreach in their local contexts.

Special Greetings and Solidarity with Manipur

The convention received special greetings from participants who had travelled long distances, including two teams from Manipur, a region currently facing significant violence and unrest. Representatives from the Evangelical Baptist Convention and Independent Church of India in Manipur shared their greetings and requested prayers for their state. Their presence at the convention was particularly meaningful, as they had endured great challenges to attend, symbolizing the resilience of the Church in India's northeast.

Greetings also came from Christian leaders across India, including Rev. Dr. John Wesley, General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of India, Rev.

Robert Clarke from Calvary Bible Church, Jhansi, Rev. Vijay Mohod, ex-board member of EFI and the founder of Bhartiya Sevak Sangati, a team from Mission India, Nagpur, and the organizers of the forthcoming Bless Bastar festival in the region. Additionally, Mr. Arun Pannal from the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum offered words of encouragement during his one-day participation.

The gathering stood in solidarity with Christians in the nation especially in Manipur, Uttar Pradesh and Bastar, regions where persecution and violence against the Christian community have escalated. The participants expressed their commitment to praying for these regions and to standing firm in their faith despite the opposition they face.

Honouring Long Service and Leadership Transition

EFI held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) during the convention, where a new board was elected. In a special ceremony, Rev. Issac Dutta and Mr. Manohar Tarala were honoured for their faithful service of 19 and 40 years, respectively. They were awarded plaques in

recognition of their dedication to God's mission through EFI. The organization also honoured its outgoing board members with plaques for their contributions over the years.

Declaration and Commitment

The convention concluded with the reading of the Declaration of the 70th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, which was unanimously approved by the participants. The declaration reaffirmed EFI's commitment to the spiritual and social welfare of the nation, recognizing the longstanding contributions of Christianity to India and calling for unity, peace, and justice amid rising persecution and opposition.

The declaration addressed the challenges facing tribal Christians in regions like Bastar, the ongoing violence in Manipur, and the threat posed by anti-

conversion laws. Despite these challenges, EFI expressed hope for the future, reaffirming its commitment to nation-building and promoting harmony among all communities.

Conclusion

The 70th Annual Convention of EFI ended on an uplifting note. The participants left Jagdalpur deeply encouraged and committed to praying for the Church in Bastar, Manipur, and other regions facing persecution. They recognized their own role as carriers of hope and pledged to continue spreading the light of the Gospel and God's love in their local contexts.

As the declaration powerfully concluded, EFI extends its hand in friendship to all who share its vision of a united, prosperous, and inclusive India, reaffirming its dedication to peace, harmony, and social justice across the nation.



Declaration of the 70th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of India

We, the members of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), gathered in Jagdalpur for our 70th Annual Convention, reaffirm our commitment to the spiritual and social welfare of our nation and all its people. As the umbrella organization and central network for Evangelicals in India, representing over 65,000 churches across the country, we recognize our responsibility to address the challenges facing our community and our nation at large. We celebrate the rich heritage of Christianity in India, which traces its roots to the apostolic era, making it as old as Christianity itself. For nearly two millennia, Christians have been an integral part of India's diverse tapestry, contributing significantly to nation building through education, healthcare, social reform, and community service. We affirm that Christianity, far from being a foreign import, is deeply woven into the fabric of Indian society. Our gathering in Jagdalpur, Bastar, is a testament to our solidarity with the Christian community in this region, where the Church has been present for approximately 150 years. We acknowledge the unique cultural identity of the tribal populations. Tribal identity is recognised in the Indian Constitution, and the rights of the people protected under law. It is distinct from religions the people may profess. We share the concerns and challenges faced by tribal Christians in Chhattisgarh, particularly in the Bastar region. It grieves us to learn of incidents where our sisters and brothers have faced violence, social ostracism, and displacement from their homes and livelihoods due to their faith. We observe with heavy hearts the

divisions that are being forced among tribal communities, which have historically lived in harmony. We call upon all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue to address these issues, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all individuals are respected, regardless of their religious beliefs. We are anxious at the unabated violence in Manipur. For more than 500 days, attacks have continued, wrecking liberty, security and civil rights. In other states in India, the United Christian Forum reports that there are two attacks daily on Christians. We urge the authorities to address these issues promptly and ensure the safety and rights of all citizens, regardless of their faith. Together with Civil Society and other minorities in the country, we note with concern the increasing stringency of anti-conversion laws, such as the recent amendment in Uttar Pradesh that extends punishments and broadens the scope for complaints. People fear such weaponisation of these controversial laws, which infringe upon the fundamental right of freedom of religion, could be misused to harass law-abiding citizens. The Evangelical Fellowship of India is troubled by further attempts to marginalize Dalit Christians, as also the growing targeting of Adivasi (Tribal) communities. We stand in solidarity with their assertion of their Constitutional status and rights. We call for a renewed commitment to social justice and equality for all segments of society. These challenges deepen our love for our country with its commitment to democracy and the progress and well-being of all citizens. We call upon all people of goodwill to join us in fostering peace, harmony, and mutual understanding among all communities. As we look to the future with hope, which was also the theme of our convention, we pledge to continue our engagement in nation-building, promoting education, health, and social welfare. We extend our hand in friendship to all who share our vision of a united, prosperous, and inclusive India. May God bless India and all its people. Issued this 19th day of September, 2024, at Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, India.

Intercessory
Prayer
Points



October 2024

1 TUESDAY Thank you Lord for the new month. Thank you for blessing the 70th EFI Annual Convention abundantly. Continue to bless us for your glory.

2 WEDNESDAY Gandhi Jayanthi. As we celebrate the birthday of Gandhiji, the father of the nation, pray for peace and prosperity for our nation. Pray that every individual would value and pursue non-violence.

3 THURSDAY Pray for the people of Daman and Diu to have fresh encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ in a new and fresh way. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work actively in believers' heart and minds. Pray also that God would send more workers to this beautiful land.

4 FRIDAY Pray for Delhi today. Pray that the love of God would overflow this city, and that men and women would turn to God for help. Pray that the churches in this city would be revived and bear many spiritual fruits. Pray also for the upcoming Christian peaceful rally on the 26th of October at Jantar Mantar.

5 SATURDAY Pray for Nagaland.

Pray for Christ to be the center of peoples' lives in this state. Pray for hunger and thirst for God's Word to grow. Pray for revival for the Churches in the state. Pray also that the people of Nagaland would live out their faith for others to see Christ and follow His teachings.

6 SUNDAY Pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that EFI would effectively continue to serve as the voice of the evangelicals. Pray for all the departments to reflect God's love and care as they function in their respective fields.

7 MONDAY Pray for Chandigarh. Pray for hearts that are teachable and ready to accept the message of the Cross. Pray that people who are sharing the Gospel would do it with the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for unity among believers and that God's love would be displayed as they stand as one in Christ.

8 TUESDAY Pray for Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Pray that the people may learn to seek God in times of trouble and need. Pray that God would provide the way to draw people to himself. Pray for more

sowers and reapers for God's glory.

9 WEDNESDAY Pray for Tamil Nadu. Pray for Churches, Christian institutions and individuals to pursue holiness and impact communities with their exemplary lives. Pray for spiritual renewal of the believers in the state.

10 THURSDAY Pray for Manipur. Pray for peace for the people of Manipur. Pray that believers would thrive despite persecutions. Pray that God would have mercy on the people of Manipur.

11 FRIDAY Pray for Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Pray that God would open the way for those seeking to know the truth. Pray for believers in this place to love the Word of God and obey it wholeheartedly and reach out to others.

12 SATURDAY Pray for Lakshadweep. Pray for God's amazing grace and love to reach every individual in these 36 islands. God, may you have mercy and grace on the people of Lakshadweep and reveal yourself to them!

13 SUNDAY Pray for all the worshippers today as they gather to honor, praise and worship Jesus Christ. Pray that God's kingdom may be extended and many dying souls will receive salvation.

14 MONDAY Pray for Kerala today that believers would have fresh desires and commitment to God, His Word and His Church. Pray that lives

may be transformed through study and obedience of God's Word. Pray also for effective witnessing and transformation work of the Holy Spirit in every nook and corner of the state.

15 TUESDAY Pray for churches in Meghalaya that their commitment to Christ would shine forth and touch the lives of people. Pray that God would use them to reach the unreached with the Word of God.

16 WEDNESDAY Pray for believers in Odisha to be strong and courageous. Pray that they would share their faith boldly and wisely to their neighbours.

17 THURSDAY Pray for the state of Uttar Pradesh. Pray that development would reach the most inner part of the state. Pray for the political leaders to work for the best interest for the people. May God shine His face towards the people of UP and show His unceasing love for them.

18 FRIDAY Pray for Caleb Institute, Gurgaon. Pray for the students and the teaching staff of this institute that they may be equipped and empowered to share the Gospel very effectively.

19 SATURDAY Pray for Maharashtra. Pray for the unreached millions in this state. Pray for more gospel workers to reach them. May the Holy Spirit actively work among them.

20 SUNDAY Pray for all Christian

agencies in our country to be accountable, faithful, consistent and focused. Pray that our works may display God's salvation grace that was revealed in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

21 MONDAY Pray for Punjab. Pray for God's servants to be strengthened despite many obstacles and challenges. Pray that the churches may grow. Pray also for the Punjab Mobile Bible Training in Punjab this month. Pray that the training would train and equip many leaders so that they would teach the Word correctly.

22 TUESDAY Pray for Rajasthan. Pray for God's light to shine on the people of Rajasthan. May God reveal Himself personally to those who seek Him.

23 WEDNESDAY Pray for Puducherry. Pray for spiritual awakening of the people of this UT. Pray that their spiritual hunger and thirst would be quenched with the Word of God. Pray for God's mercy and grace for this land.

24 THURSDAY Pray for Evangelical Trust of North India (ETANI). Pray that God would give them wisdom and discernment as they deal with church properties and legal cases.

25 FRIDAY Pray for Madhya Pradesh. Pray for the churches in MP that they would shine brightly despite the many challenges they face. Pray that they would bear many spiritual fruits.

26 SATURDAY Pray for peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi. Pray that the voice of the Christians may be heard and that discrimination against them may stop.

27 SUNDAY Today let us pray for our pastors, evangelists, missionaries and all those in church leadership. Pray that they may serve their respective responsibilities with deep love and concern and put others ahead of them. May our churches display the love of God through our works and deeds.

28 MONDAY Pray for Sikkim. Pray that the Holy Spirit would move people's hearts and minds and draw multitude to Christ and His Word. Pray for the strengthening of the Churches in this state to be the salt and light in their communities.

29 TUESDAY Pray for Assam today. Pray for growth in all areas. Pray for political leaders to govern the state with integrity, love and understanding. Pray that the church may persevere and declare God's glory in every possible way.

30 WEDNESDAY Pray for revival in Jharkhand. Pray that the Word of God would be accepted and practiced and that it would change people's mindset and eventually their lives.

31 THURSDAY Thank God for his enablement as we close the month. All glory to Him!



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3rd Floor (AC)	80	6,000	4,000	2,000
Ground Floor (Non AC)	40	7,000	5,000	2,000

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Published date on 25 September 2024
Posting date 26/27 September 2024

RNI. Regd. No. 19728/70 / Postal
Registration No. DL(S)-01/3241/2018-20
Licensed to post without prepayment at
NDPSO New Delhi -110 002 / U(SE)-9/2018-20

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Printed & Published by Mr. Vijayesh Lal, on behalf of EFI Publication Trust,
805/92 Deepali Building, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110 019.
Printed at Royal Press, B-82, Okhla Phase -1, New Delhi - 110 020.
Editor Mr. Vijayesh Lal