

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Another chance has come again to greet you all on behalf of our brethren in the Luzon area of the Philippines. It is a great thing that once in a year we can convey our fondness through a letter like this, reassuring you of our feeling of attachment to all whom God has called in these last days.

"No man is an island, one can't stand alone." This is an adage that connotes a need of human relationship—a very important ingredient in human existence. Ironically, human relationships are often shattered by misunderstandings and incompatibilities, so much so that even the best of marriages can be broken after a few years of struggle against very serious problems. On the other hand, man is by nature a social being, attracted by another individual or a group with whom he identifies himself. He proves to be faithful in his attachment, even willing to lay down his life for the sake of that relationship.

Where can we find the most vital relationship which can unite us inseparably to someone beyond this present existence?

The Most Vital Relationship

Most relationships in this world are the result of mutual attraction, while other relationships are on the basis of compatibility. Many others are established as a result of a personal need of both parties concerned. Here is a relationship that started differently. It started with a *call*. The choice is one-sided and determined by a permanent decree of an eternal plan to be fulfilled in its own time.

Just after being baptized, with jubilant steps and determination, Jesus of Nazareth, trailed His way into the wilderness. In His solitary stay—fasting for forty days and forty nights—He confirmed to Himself a mission of being sent by the Father. With the start of His mission, He also started calling His disciples along the coast of Galilee. Just a simple call:

"Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." They followed Him, establishing a master/pupil relationship; an attachment between at least two individuals, the master who is willing to teach and the disciple who is willing to learn. Jesus did not promise any comfortable position nor a material reward; instead, a warning to one who wanted to volunteer: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Likewise, the disciples were not men of valor or any popularity. They were just fishermen, peasants, a tax collector, and perhaps one of them a physician.

The essential fact that established the relationship was a *call*. They were not volunteers. They were not self-appointed nor recommended by somebody. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," He later reminded them.

Thus from a simple call to follow, a master/disciple (teacher/pupil) relationship was established. As days went along, the relationship developed with a great deal of faith, trust, and confidence on the part of the disciples. More revelations were made by the Teacher, cultivating more obedience and allegiance to Him. But those who were not called—but were attracted to follow—were easily offended and were more than willing to leave with the slightest trial.

Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:65–66).

On the contrary, the called-out ones—the twelve—confirmed their faithfulness when asked: "Will ye also go away?" To which Peter answered, ". . . to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:67–69).

The *call* proved to have more tenacity in establishing the relationship than in those who in their own carnal inclinations tried to follow Him. The *call* leads one to a deeper understanding of the divine relationship than in those who do not receive it from the Father. The Pharisees insisted that they had Abraham, their father, to warrant their relationship with God (Matthew 3:9; John 8:39). The Jews murmured: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? . . . How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:42, 52). And there were many more negative retorts. These indications of the lack of a call are also manifestations of failure to understand truth.

The called-out ones relate themselves to their Master differently. Their ears are open to instructions, their eyes to understanding, and their minds receptive to truth. They are always ready to internalize the lessons that they learn from their Master.

The *Call* Enabled Relationships to Grow

As days and months went by, the disciples absorbed and practiced in their daily lives the principles taught by their Teacher. The relationship of master/pupil between Jesus and the twelve had grown to a master/friend relationship. At almost the end of His mission on earth, Jesus told them:

Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you (John 15:15).

On one occasion when He was teaching them to serve and love one another, He said during a foot washing ceremony:

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:13–14).

Let us notice that the disciples were ready to accept the truth that Christ is the Passover Lamb of God. At that last Passover celebration they had with Christ, they were able to understand what Jesus meant when He solemnly declared: "Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament . . ." (Matthew 26:26–28). As they ate the bread and drank the wine, they remembered the principle that Jesus spelled out to the Jews as recorded in John 6:53–56:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Is there yet a relationship more beautifully pictured by such truth as being united to and with the Master?

Thus the relationship between the caller and the called have reached a degree beyond a lord/servant relationship—that of a friend to a friend; nay, but even more than that. Paul said by inspiration concerning Christ and the Church (the called out ones): "For we are members, of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30).

The Spirit Is Willing But the Flesh Is Weak

The Apostle John recorded the guiding principles and promises to establish this ultimate relationship with the Lord and with one another. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12–13). Please read John chapters 13 through 16.

Their minds were open and receptive but like other physical human beings, they had their own individual weaknesses. That night after the last supper, in spite of warnings of things that were about to happen and advice to: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," the disciples were found sleeping, to which He said: ". . . the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." That night, just as Jesus foretold, His disciples were scattered as He was arrested by authorities. Only the impulsive Peter (along with John) had the audacity to follow his Master with the arresting officers. But his boldness did not last long, for three times in a row he had denied his Master at the mere reproach of women—the maidservants of the high priest (Matthew 26:69–75).

At this point, let us remember that these chosen ones—called to be apostles—had not yet received the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Although highly trained to overcome human trials with abundant knowledge, they were bound to fail without God's Spirit in them: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me . . . without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4–5). He advised them to remain in the city of Jerusalem until they received the promised power from the Father (Luke 24:49).

At the event of Pentecost, Christ fulfilled that promise—to give "power from on high," the Holy Spirit. The same Peter who was cowed by the reproach of two maidservants is now a dynamic speaker and a fearless defender of the truth. Before the council (the high priest reprimanding them) Peter and the others said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28–29). The presence of the Holy Spirit in man makes the difference.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. . . . But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Romans 8:5, 11) [Please read through verse 30].

Give Diligence to Make Your Calling and Election Sure

Brothers and sisters, are we related to God and to one another through a call from our Lord, Jesus Christ? Is this attachment growing into a more vital relationship, just as with those called-out ones in the past, to fulfill God's plan in His Church?

The ultimate fulfillment of this vital relationship is portrayed by the Feast of Tabernacles that we are about to celebrate. The Lord's Prayer in John 17 will be completely fulfilled:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:21–23).

Once again in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, we come with awesome anticipation of the fulfillment of that prayer—the culmination of the best relationship between God and man.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Let us note that when we see our Lord as He is and are "like Him," our relationship will have developed to its ultimate goal. There is no higher degree of relationship than that of the human potential of being One like Him.

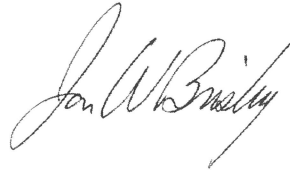
Let us make sure of our calling, and with diligence maintain our relationship with our Father in heaven and His Son Jesus Christ. With His faith in us, let us live by His virtue, the power that exudes from Him in every step of faith we make. Let us grow in knowledge of His truth, and be steadfast, unmovable by the confusion of this world. Let us gain mastery of ourselves by living His principles and practice temperance in all things. In times of trials, suffering and pain, or in persecutions and troubled situations, let us be clothed with patience. Let us not have godliness in form only, but in power cultivate constancy in fervent prayer and unfailing attendance in every holy convocation. In all our ways we need to acknowledge Him; in His faithfulness and mercy, let us ever be grateful. When we empathize and sympathize with other people's sufferings and needs, we develop compassion and brotherly

kindness. In love, let us not be wanting, but abound in all of these fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. May we all grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, ever aware of the growing relationship we have with Him and God our Father.

With all our love and devotion to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corsino C. Canta". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Corsino C. Canta

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby". The script is cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jon W. Brisby