

Church, Tradition and Scripture Where does the Authority Hide?

An examination of Eastern Orthodoxy's view.

By Caleb Suko
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Forward

Growing up the only thing I knew about the Orthodox Church was that their buildings had funny steeples on them. We didn't have any Orthodox Churches in our small town. All I knew I gleaned from National Geographic magazine or from TV programs.

As a sophomore in high school I took a driver's education course where I developed a small crush on a new girl in our school. She and her family had just moved from Alaska where they attended an Orthodox Church.

We had some interesting discussions about her faith and her church and when she invited me to visit her church I didn't hesitate in taking her up on her offer. Her family attended a small church about 75 miles away called "Church of the Holy Trinity". It was part of the Orthodox Church of America.

Everything was new to me including the use of liturgy, candles and burning of incense. Little did I know that God would later call me to live and minister in a country where the Orthodox Church was the dominant religion.

Introduction

While the Orthodox Church is broad in its scope I believe the issues brought up in this book are common enough that they would be applicable to nearly all Orthodox churches, however, they are especially relevant to the country of Ukraine where I currently live.

The first problem area I would like to examine is the Orthodox belief in the authority of the Church. The Church as a divine institution and a manifestation of Christ is given great authority in the Orthodox faith. So much so that many Orthodox believers cannot comprehend understanding Scripture or even being saved apart from the Church. One can easily see how this would create great problems for the missionary who is preaching the gospel apart from the “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” Church (I Believe..., 9)

The second problem I would like to address is the problem of Tradition. Tradition for the Orthodox is always spelled with a capital “T”. Why? Because it is honored at the same level of authority as Scripture. As a protestant we can trace our roots back as far as Luther, 500 years ago. To us this may be impressive but to the Orthodox this is a joke. After all they can make strong historical arguments that their lineage extends all the way back to the apostles.

Furthermore as a Baptist I can truly only go back about 250 years. Again this presents a problem when witnessing to an Orthodox Christian. In the Orthodox mind what we have to say is completely un-authoritative because it is not backed by Tradition.

My objective is to detail the Orthodox doctrine of the authority of both the Church and Ecclesiastical Tradition and then to briefly respond to these doctrines. Finally I will give some helpful information for those who may be trying to witness to an Orthodox believer.

What is Orthodoxy?

The term “orthodox” comes from two Greek words. The first “orth” means “correct” and the second part “dox” can either be translated as “worship” or “doctrine”. The same term in Russian is “православный” can only be translated “correct worship”.

The Orthodox Church is often called the Eastern Church because of the split that took place in 1054. This is sometimes called the Great Schism and depending on who you talk to you will find different reasons for it. At the time of the Great Schism the head of the Orthodox Church was in the East in Constantinople. Thus, it became the Eastern Church.

There are a few very recognizable differences between the Eastern Church and the Western (Catholic) Church. For instance, the Eastern Church adds the lower slanted beam to their cross, they have onion domes on their churches, their clergy have beards and are usually married. In addition to these there are also many differences below the surface.

Today about 16 major Orthodox Churches around the world divided mainly along language and ethnic lines. Most of them are located in Eastern and Southern Europe. The Church claims 225-300 million followers making it the second largest Christian church in the world. The largest Orthodox Church is the Russian Orthodox Church –Moscow Patriarch with about 150 million followers.

There are three major Orthodox Churches in Ukraine: Ukrainian Orthodox –Moscow Patriarch, Ukrainian Orthodox –Kiev Patriarch and The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. These three churches claim about 70% of all religious followers in Ukraine.

Deep Roots

As an American when I refer to history I'm usually referring to something that happened 100 or 200 years ago. For me tradition is our annual vacation to the beach or the weekly family game night. Relatively speaking America has had little time to develop her traditions. Furthermore the ethnic diversity of America has not provided a suitable climate for any traditions to take a universal hold on the people.

Ukraine, however, is far different. The Orthodox faith was brought into the Russian Empire through Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev towards the end of the tenth century (Zernov 111). For over 1,000 years the Orthodox faith has held its position as the most powerful religion in Ukraine. In comparison, the communist regime of the USSR was a short lived 70 years. Even during Soviet times many still considered themselves Orthodox believers.

The amazing thing about Orthodoxy is that it truly hasn't changed much if any in the last 1,000 years. Although, Orthodox scholars will tell you that their faith and traditions haven't changed in the last 2,000 years! This sort of staunch unchanging nature is one of the major reasons why Orthodoxy has managed to embed itself so deeply into the life and tradition of the people of Ukraine.

The people

The average Orthodox person in Ukraine does not regularly attend services. It would be common to attend a few times a year on big holidays like Christmas, Easter or Pentecost.

It is also common to attend baptisms and weddings at the church. My wife, Christina was baptized in the Orthodox church when she was three years old. Although few people will rarely attend a service, their loyalty and sentiments about the Church run high and deep. The people show great respect for the Church building and its clergy. Services are generally conducted while everyone stands reverently and no one is allowed in the Church building without proper attire.

When it comes to doctrine most attendees know very little about the specifics of the church's theology. Liturgy is used in most services which are conducted in old Slavonic. As a result there is very little teaching done.

However, in recent years some churches have started to offer Sunday school for children and adults. Generally, Sunday school is used to teach about the church fathers, orthodox tradition, and some topical issues like prayer and healing.

Unfortunately, many churches ignore the advice that the Apostle Paul gave to a young Timothy who was the pastor of the church in Ephesus. "Preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2)

Authority of the Church

The logic behind the authority of the Church is quite simple, it is as follows: Since Christ is the head of the Church and the Church is his body it carries with it the Divine authority of Christ.

The Orthodox Church draws a clear line between their doctrine of Church authority and the Roman Catholic's doctrine. While the Roman Catholic Church believes that the authority rests in the one Pope the Orthodox Church claims that the authority rests in the Church as a whole. They take Paul's statements about the Church as the body of Christ quite literally.

And He has put all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

In their view there is no distinction between the Church and Christ. Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, a priest in the Orthodox Church explains;

“The Church is the extension of the Incarnation, the place where the Incarnation perpetuates itself.” (245) “Christ and the Holy Spirit cannot err, and since the Church is Christ's body, since it is a continued Pentecost, it is therefore infallible”(252).

This infallibility is expressed through the unity of the Church. According to Orthodox theologians an ecumenical council may be in error, although usually not. The true test of whether or not the synod was in error is whether or not the Church as a whole accepts whatever has been agreed upon. Thus, it is only the Church as a whole that is infallible.

In response to Pope Pius IX accusation that the Orthodox Church forces the decisions of the synod upon the people as infallible Khomiakov wrote:

The Pope is greatly mistaken in supposing that we consider the ecclesiastical hierarchy to be the guardian of dogma. The case is quite different. The unvarying constancy and the unerring truth of Christian dogma does not depend upon any hierarchical order; it is guarded by the totality, by the whole people of the Church, which is the Body of Christ (Russia and the English Church, 94).

Because the Church is the final authority here on earth it is up to the Church to decide what doctrines are correct and what doctrines are in error. This is usually done through a synod.

The Orthodox Church generally recognizes only the first seven ecumenical councils as being truly ecumenical and authoritative. The last council they recognize is the second council of Nicea in 787.

In 1054 what is commonly called “The Great Schism” took place. Most historians say that this was the straw that broke the camel's back and the Eastern Church in Constantinople finally separated herself from Rome. However, according to Orthodox teaching this was not really a schism but it was the point at which the Church in Rome withdrew its self from the Holy Orthodox Church. Because of the schism there has never been a truly ecumenical council since.

Nevertheless the Orthodox Church claims that it is the one true church of Christ. As a result they have been entrusted with the doctrines and have been given the authority to teach them. Outside of the Orthodox Church no true teaching can take place nor can there be a true understanding of God's Word.

The bishops themselves have been given a special charisma from the Holy Spirit that enables them to preach and teach God's Word accurately.

“At his consecration a bishop receives a special gift or *charisma* from the Holy Spirit, in virtue of which he acts as a teacher of the faith”(Ware 253)

This type of theology has two negative side effects upon Orthodox believers. First, if the Church is the only one who can make decisions on theology then why should the individual study theology at all? Even if an individual were to study theology he would have to do it without making any reasonable decisions for himself.

The Scriptures were written in the Church, by the Church and for the Church. Outside the Church, the Scriptures cannot be understood. One trying to comprehend the Scriptures though outside the Church is like a stranger trying to comprehend the correspondence between two members of the same family. The Holy Scriptures lose their meaning, the sense of their expression and their content for the man who is a stranger to the Church, to Her life, to Her Mysteries and to Her Traditions, since they were not written for him. Hence, I refuse human reason the right to make clear distinctions between what it thinks to be *primary* and what *secondary*. (I Believe... 10)

As a result individuals are discouraged from studying theology for themselves and with great trust rely upon the fact that all truth and only truth will come from the Holy Orthodox Church.

At this point I want to make it clear that the Orthodox understanding that they are the guardian of theology was probably the result of an honest attempt to keep Church doctrine pure and the Churches united as a whole. While this desire is noble the method used to attain this goal has great problems.

There is a second negative side effect that this type of theology has upon believers. Whenever someone may come across a differing theology they will neither have the means to defend their own theological stance nor to correctly evaluate the theology they are confronted with. This seems to be in contradiction with the apostle Peter who said,

“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (I Peter 3:15)

The Divine authority of the Church also affects the area of Biblical interpretation. As the guardian of all truth the Church not only decides what doctrines are true and what doctrines are not, but also how each verse of Scripture is interpreted. Regarding the argument for the Orthodox theory of Divine inspiration the Archbishop of Australia explains.

It will also use ample proof to make clear that irregular Divine inspiration belongs organically to the Church, not only because it alone could define and recognize the canon of the authentic biblical texts, but more importantly because

biblical revelation in itself was recorded by the Church and in the Church. Therefore only in the Church, and in the communion of the Holy Spirit unceasingly guaranteed therein, is it possible for Scripture to be interpreted properly, that is to say authentically, as the Word of God (Harkianakis p12).

Again the Orthodox Church has tried to protect faith and in reality they have damaged it. In Orthodoxy the Bible as a book is greatly honored and almost worshipped. Orthodoxy lays claim to some of the most expensive Bibles in the World. Like their buildings many of their Bibles are overlaid with expensive jewels and gold. One Orthodox Church has a Bible with so much gold on it that it has to be carried by two people.

Despite this reverence for the Bible as a divine book it would be very uncommon in the former Soviet states for a lay person to possess his own copy of the Bible. But then again why would they need to? The individual can neither interpret nor do theology on his own. One may cite communism as the reason for a lack of Bibles in the past century, however, even today when Bibles are flooding into the former Soviet republics there remains a lack of Bibles or at least Bible knowledge many who claim to be Orthodox.

Paul's instructions to Timothy are especially appropriate for the Orthodox Church as he exhorts Timothy to study God's Word on his own.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)

Of course Orthodox theologians can protest and say, “But Timothy was an ordained bishop in the church, so he had the right to study and teach God's Word!”

It's true that Timothy was the pastor of a church, however, I don't believe Paul's exhortation was limited to those who had been ordained. Another great passage of Scripture that sheds light on this is Acts 17:10.

And these were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things were so. (Acts 17:10)

In this passage the whole church is commended by Luke (the author of Acts and personal physician of Paul) for diligently comparing what the Apostle Paul said with the Scripture. If anyone was qualified to teach without being questioned it was Paul!

- Paul was personally called to the ministry by Jesus
- Paul was the author of much of the New Testament
- Paul was one of the few first apostles
- Paul had been to heaven
- Paul spoke in tongues and did miracles

All of these qualifications weren't enough. When Paul spoke he didn't mind if people were checking what he was saying with Scripture. He knew that he was fallible, he wanted everyone in the church to diligently study God's Word for themselves!

Finally the doctrine of the divine authority of the Church affects the way in which the Orthodox Church thinks about the salvation of mankind. The Protestant idea of *sola fide, sola grata, sola scriptura* (*faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone*) is incomprehensible to the Orthodox Church. In casual conversation with most Orthodox believers they will tell you most assuredly that salvation is by grace through faith. What they don't tell you, however, is that apart from the Church there is no salvation.

“From the Church, Christ reaches out to us with the sacraments to bring to us his grace and love. Every sacrament puts us in touch with Christ and applies to us the power of the Cross and the Resurrection. St. Leo the Great said, ‘He who was visible as our Redeemer has now passed into the Sacraments.’ ...The Sacraments are the way to theosis (*becoming like God/salvation*)”(Coniaris 123).

Here Orthodox theology is somewhat similar to Catholicism in that they believe that through the administration of sacraments grace is imparted. The sacraments can only be administered through a qualified bishop and a bishop can only be qualified through the administration of the Orthodox Church. Generally there are seven sacraments which include; Eucharist, baptism, confirmation, penance, holy orders, marriage, and anointment of the sick. A saying among the Orthodox is that if you don't have the Church for your Mother you can't have God for your Father.

The Authority of Tradition

The Orthodox Church is perhaps more steeped in tradition than any other Christian Church. Its ancient buildings seem to breathe tradition. Walking into an old Church building one's senses are overwhelmed by hundreds of painted icons, stained glass windows, decorative gold trim, the flickering or dozens of candles and the thick aroma of burned incense. The scene is ancient and the feeling is timeless.

Not only does tradition dictate how the building is decorated but it also plays a very prominent role in how the worship service is conducted. Any Orthodox believer will quickly tell you that the way his Church worships is exactly how the apostolic Church worshipped in the first century. Tradition also plays a great role in their understanding of revelation.

According to the Orthodox Church ecclesiastical tradition is the only way in which we receive authoritative information from God. There is both written tradition and oral tradition. Written tradition includes the Bible but is not limited to it, also included are the writings of the canonized Church fathers.

Oral traditions that have been passed down since the apostles are also considered to have authority that is equal to that of the Bible and other written traditions. Speaking of the preservation of Holy Tradition in the Church Konstantinidis states,

“Only in a perspective such as this can one understand why we, Orthodox, consider Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition as two sources of revelation of equal weight and authority, as two equivalent sources of dogma and supernatural faith”(222).

As mentioned earlier the Orthodox Church claims that the Bible was written by the Church and for the Church, thus it is kept by the Church. The same is true for the canonized Church fathers and the oral traditions. Interestingly they hold that the Septuagint is the most accurate text for the Old Testament and the Greek text for the New Testament (Ware, 208), I could not find whether or not they adhere to any particular family of Greek texts. As for the Septuagint most Orthodox scholars believe that 10 Deutero-Canonical books are part of the Bible but don't have as much authority as the rest of the Old Testament.

Many protestants would be surprised to know that according to the Orthodox Church there is information contained in extra biblical sources which is necessary for salvation.

“There exists in Tradition elements which, although not mentioned in the New Testament as they are in the Church today, are indispensable to the salvation of our souls”(Archbishop Michael, 13)

Furthermore Tradition is the means by which the Orthodox Church tries to make the claim that they are the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. They claim that their bishops and priests are the only ones who have been ordained through apostolic succession.

“The sacrament of ordination possesses, in the Orthodox Church, a great importance, and no one who is not in possession of the apostolic succession has any right to perform any sort of priestly or pastoral function”(Eastern Orthodox Theology, 30).

Because no one outside of the Orthodox Church has been ordained through apostolic succession it can be concluded that any church outside of the Orthodox Church is not truly a church.

Tradition is very important not simply to the doctrines and practices of every Orthodox Church but also to the individual. We must be careful that we don't judge the Orthodox too harshly because of their stance on Tradition. After all we do admit that their traditional roots are buried far deeper than ours. In addition each individual believer looks to his rich historical past as the proof that his religion is true. Anthony Ugulnick describes well how Orthodox believers view their past.

This charisma of tradition is something that American Christians must grasp in order to appreciate the nature of Russian Christianity. Tradition does not involve and estrangement from the present and an abiding exclusively in the past.... Tradition involves an abiding "incarnation" of past teaching in the present. Of course, each Russian Orthodox is conscious of the rich history that for a thousand years has placed the gospel in Russia. Russian believers feel themselves to be entrusted with the witness of those who came before them. Confident that they, too, will witness to those who come after them, the Orthodox see themselves as a "living legacy" to succeeding generations (132).

I think perhaps this concept of tradition is far removed from the thinking of many American minds. As Americans it is easy for us to simply laugh at tradition, however if we are to be effective in our witness to Orthodox believers we must approach the matter with a serious mind. One thing that many Orthodox believers detest is the flippant way many evangelicals approach God and the worship service. At this point we may be able to learn something from the Orthodox Church.

How to talk with an Orthodox believer

The authority of the Church and the authority of ecclesiastical tradition are not the only problem doctrines in Orthodoxy. Truthfully there are many other doctrines that as an evangelicals I would be opposed to. However, when one enters into discussion with an Orthodox believer it is important to steer away from those smaller doctrinal differences. Often these smaller issues can lead to hours of word battles where both parties walk away defeated.

Start with relationship

In general I do not suggest immediately discussing theology with a person you just met. In my experience you will do little to convince them. You probably don't correctly understand their theological background and in the end you'll walk away having ruined any chance to build a meaningful relationship with that person.

If we really want people to listen to us in a meaningful way we must be willing to listen to them and that means we need to start with a personal relationship. This is not exclusive when witnessing to an Orthodox believer but rather a general principle. Build a relationship and you build trust and the right to share your opinions and belief.

Before I began sharing my beliefs with someone I want them to have seen and felt those beliefs in me. This can only be done through relationship as I show them the power of the love of Christ in my life.

We need to take Paul's example to the Thessalonians seriously.

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse warmly cherishes her children. So affectionately longing for you, we were willing to have imparted to you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us. For, brothers, you remember our labor and toil. *For* laboring night and day in order not to put a burden on any one of you, we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-9)

Establish common ground

Many Orthodox priests in Ukraine will tell their people that evangelical churches are "sects" or "cults". What they fail to tell them is that there really is a lot that we agree upon. Very few regular attendees realize that we have so much in common.

We can simply start by stating a few of the beliefs we hold in common like;

- The inspiration of Scripture
- The two natures of Christ
- The resurrection
- The problem of sin
- The need for a Savior

By establishing this common ground we help remove one more barrier and hopefully our Orthodox friend will realize that evangelical Christianity is not a "sect" but it rather made up of true followers of Christ who love Jesus and love their neighbors.

Confront the problem

Although the Orthodox Church holds the Bible in high regard it's not their only authority. Tradition and the teaching of the Church stand right alongside the Bible and sometimes above it. We need to point out that the Bible affirms its own authority.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture came into being of *its* own private interpretation. For prophecy was not borne at any time by *the* will of man, but holy men of God spoke being borne along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (2 Timothy 3:16)

Furthermore phrases like "thus says the Lord" are found hundreds of times in the Bible. However, tradition rarely if ever makes these types of claims about itself. Peter, Paul, John and Jesus all testify to the inspiration of Scripture, yet none of them indicate that tradition is on the same level. In fact Jesus does quite the opposite when he confronts the Pharisees. He rebukes them relying heavily upon their traditions.

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. But He answered and said to them, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and mother"; and, "He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him die by death." But you say, Whoever says to *his* father or mother, Whatever you would gain from me, *It is a gift to God*; and in no way he honors his father or his mother. And you voided the commandment of God by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, "This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they worship Me, teaching *for doctrines the* commandments of men." (Matthew 15:1-9)

If the Pharisees ancient traditions were condemned why should the Orthodox traditions be any different?

Point out the inconsistency

One claim often made by the Orthodox is that the Orthodox Church is the only one true Church. This claim has one truly large problem, there is more than one Orthodox Church in fact there are as many as sixteen. In response to this many will say that the different Orthodox Churches are simply a result of geographic location and different languages and ethnic groups.

However often in a single city in Ukraine you can find two, three, or more different types of Orthodox Churches. In addition the political relations between some of the Churches is not always that cordial. The fact is that between the Churches there are disagreements on many doctrinal issues.

Direct them back to God's Word

In order to effectively witness to an Orthodox believer one must enable him to open his eyes and think for himself and not simply run to the Church in order to ask for a correct interpretation.

We need to understand that this is first the work of the Holy Spirit. I think we ought to pray as Paul did, **“I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened.”** (Eph 1.8) Without this humble recognition we can easily become discouraged thinking that everything depends on our abilities to win the argument.

That being said, we do have a responsibility to point them back to God’s Word. Give your friend a Bible to read. Especially relevant would be the book of Hebrews. Orthodox believers need to understand that Jesus has already done it all.

There is no more need for a priest to intercede for us because Jesus is our High Priest.

Now the sum of the things which we have spoken *is this*: We have such a High Priest, who has sat down on *the* right of the throne of the Majesty in Heaven, (Hebrews 8:1)

There is also no need for an earthly temple because each believer is a temple.

**Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?
(1Corinthians 3:16)**

The church is not a building made of stones and gold but made up of followers of Christ!

Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being *the* chief cornerstone, in whom every building having been fitly framed together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a dwelling place of God through *the* Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Salvation comes only through simple faith in Jesus, not through sacraments or other religious traditions.

**For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are *His* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:8-10)**

Is an Orthodox Believer Saved?

I have been asked this questions numerous times and my answer is the same no matter what group we are talking about. Being saved has nothing to do with whether or not I call myself a Baptist, Orthodox, Catholic, Presbyterian or even Mormon! True salvation does not come through any group or institute on earth. True salvation is always individual and is always based on simple faith in Jesus Christ and his life, death and resurrection! (1 cor 15:3-4)

It is very possible that there are true believers who attend the Orthodox Church and who have come to true faith in Jesus despite the teachings of their church. Our job is not to attack the church but to lovingly share the simple hope of Christ.

Unfortunately many who attend the Orthodox Church are also caught up in a web of tradition and works based salvation that tends to drown out the pure truth of God's Word. Ultimately it is God's Word that must penetrate the heart of every person and bring him to the point of repentance and saving faith. Opening the Scriptures and letting the Holy Spirit work is the best thing we can do with our Orthodox friends or with anyone for that matter!

**For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in *the* Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of *men* we were among you for your sake.
(1Thessalonians 1:5)**

**For the Word of God *is* living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to *the* dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
(Heb 4:12)**

About the Author

Caleb serves with his family as a missionary in Odessa, Ukraine. His ministry is focused on growing healthy Christ centered local churches. This is accomplished through training young believers at the Church Ministries Institute, where Caleb serves as the vice president.

He is also involved in personal discipleship, and works closely alongside Ukrainian pastors to help strengthen and multiply the church in Ukraine and beyond.

A native of Washington State, Caleb grew up in Gig Harbor where his father started [Discovery Baptist Church](#) in 1980.

Caleb met his wife Christina at Shasta Bible College in Redding, California in 1996. As they got to know each other, they realized that the Lord had already directed both of them towards missions.

Christina was born and raised in the former Soviet Union and came to the U.S. in 1996 to study at Shasta Bible College in California.

Caleb and Christina are sent by [Discovery Baptist](#) where Caleb served as a pastoral intern from 1999-2005. Caleb graduated from Northwest Baptist Seminary with a Master of Divinity in 2005. Christina graduated from Shasta Bible College in 1999. The Sukos have five children.



The Suko Family June 2012
To learn more about Caleb and his family please visit
<http://sukofamily.org>

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