THE WEDDING GARMENT



And he saith unto him, Friend, **how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?**
For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:12, 14)

Petru Loga

And he saith unto him, Friend, **how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?** And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:12, 14)

I counsel thee **to buy of me** gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; **and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed,** and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; (Revelation 3:18)

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in **white raiment;** and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life. (Revelation 3:5)

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God's Plan for Man

We believe that the most important thing in this short life we live is to know God's plan concerning us humans, to know what purpose God had when He created man. It is extremely important for us to know why we are born and why we live this short life on earth.

We notice that when we are asked to give an answer about what will come after this life is spent, and about what we must do to gain entry into the Kingdom of God, the great majority of people do not know what the Word of God says on this matter.

The general conviction is that if we admire God for what He has done for us, if we believe in the sacrifice on the cross, if we confess our sins, if we have a form of godliness, we will obtain a salvation that consists only in the forgiveness of sins.

It seems that very few realize that repentance and faith in the sacrifice on the cross are only some of the things a person must do at the beginning of the life of faith. It is easy to see that a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures is one of the things that keeps a person in this ignorance. (Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. Matthew 22:29)

Most of us stop at repentance, at the work of the cross... at the covenant in the water of baptism, at the forgiveness of sins. For many, the work of salvation ends here, without their realizing that God's plan provides both for restoration and for reaching the stature of a perfect man, that is, the perfecting of man's character.

Almost no one understands that in order to be found worthy of the life that awaits us in His eternal Kingdom, we must grow until we reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; ... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, ... till we all come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13)

This plan of God was made in eternity, before man was created. The purpose of the heavenly Father was to make brothers for the Lord Jesus, and it is the most complex and magnificent plan ever drawn up.

From reading the Scripture we can see that God had in view not merely the creation of beings superior to the angels; His purpose was to make a being in whom His nature would be manifested, one who would be in His image and likeness. He created a being altogether different from everything He had created until then. (And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. Genesis 1:26-27)

We can state with certainty that when God created man, He had a purpose totally different from His purpose for the angels, who were created with the status of servants. God decided to make brothers for the Lord Jesus, to populate His Kingdom with beings who would be like His Son.

If the first man was deceived by Satan and his sin passed upon all, this does not mean that a mistake crept into God's plan. All things happened as foreseen in this plan made in eternity, which God had worked out down to the smallest details.

God begins this work of restoring the image of Christ in man at the moment of the new birth, and He has all power to bring us to the perfection required by the standard of His Kingdom. (being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6)

God's plan is not limited to a cheap salvation that consists only in repentance and the forgiveness of sins; it provides for the restoring of the image of God in us (the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man) and for bringing us to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

That is why it is extremely important for a person to know: why he must be drawn by the beauty of Christ's character, why he must love Him, why he must repent, and why he must deny himself and trust in the Word of Christ!

The Scripture shows us that, for the restoration of man, God has included in His plan these four great things, and they are strictly necessary to us for the salvation of the soul.

We will therefore try to set out in detail these four essential points in the process of man's salvation, all of them equally important.

Faith is one of the things of great importance before God; without it there can be no talk of salvation. (But without faith it is impossible to please him! Hebrews 11:6)

As to what it means "to believe in the Lord Jesus", we notice with sadness that today this faith is misunderstood by more and more people.

One interpretation we hear more and more often is: Believe that the Lord Jesus is your personal Saviour, believe in His sacrifice, believe that He died for the forgiveness of your sins, that He rose again... and you are saved. The Gospel of Christ is often reduced to just a few words about the Lord's sacrifice and resurrection.

Let us ask ourselves: Is it enough to believe only these minimal things? Is this the "Gospel" the Lord Jesus meant when He commanded that it be preached to every person? (... preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Mark 16:15, 16)

Let us ask ourselves seriously: Does faith in the Lord's sacrifice and resurrection save, even if that faith does not work together with my works? (What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? James 2:14)

We can see that most people have a mental faith, of which the Holy Scripture says that it **is dead**, comparing it to the faith of the devils. (Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble! James 2:17, 19)

If the Scripture says that the devils also have this dead faith, then there must also be **"a living faith"**, which they do not have, through which we become pleasing to God.

When God created man, He endowed him with the capacity to think, to reason, to believe, to make decisions, to admire, to love and to choose. This is because He determined beforehand in His plan that we should be like Him. (For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:28-29)

God created us and endowed us with these capacities, and it is our responsibility to use them, to work together with Him, in order to reach the stature He has determined. This is the highest thing to which a person can aspire. (that ye put on the new man, which after God is created. Ephesians 4:24)

We have been endowed with the capacity to believe, and we notice that every mentally healthy person uses this capacity very often in daily activities.

One can easily see the close link between the information that reaches our ears and the actions that result from what we hear and what we believe about that information. To show this link, we will use an illustration:

–While I am a pupil at school, I learn about natural disasters. I learn many details about storms and hurricanes that wreak havoc, devastate everything in their path, bring floods and claim hundreds or thousands of victims. I am taught that if such a situation arises, in order to save yourself you must stop what you are doing and take refuge in a shelter.

Each of us, on hearing this information, has the capacity to believe it to be true or to consider it false. God has placed in all of us the capacity to analyse and to believe, on the basis of which a person may or may not believe the information received. At this passive stage, when I am only being informed, even if I believe that information, it does not move me to action. This faith concerning that information is good, and I do well to believe it, but it is a passive or dead faith, a faith that requires no works of me.

– Later in life, at some point, I am in town to settle an urgent matter that cannot be put off, and I pass through an area where representatives of the town authorities are informing the population of the approach of a storm of great proportions that will strike the locality. They also give the necessary instructions about how to be saved.

There have never been such disasters in my locality, and I have never faced such things until now. On hearing this terrible news about the coming disaster, I must make a decision. I can disbelieve this warning, or believe it and go on alert.

If I do not give credence to the warning, the information I have about storms from school will be of no use to me at all. If I give credence to the news, this faith will oblige me to go into action and to follow the authorities' instructions in order to save myself.

So in the situation of this terrible event (the imminent storm), my capacity to believe can show itself as:

Unbelief – I do not believe that such a catastrophe can come our way; I carry on with my business and do nothing to protect my life.

Passive or dead faith – I give credence to the news and I am thankful to the person who informed me. But I put it off, so as to settle my urgent matters, disregarding the message brought to me. I disregard the instructions for being saved, and I do not take refuge in a shelter. I decide that I too will shelter somewhere in a more protected place, but not in a safe shelter as the authorities direct.

Genuine faith or living faith – when I receive this information, which obliges me to act, I believe it to be true. I go on alert, I leave everything I had to do, I decide to act, I engage my will, and I do what such a situation requires. I accept the authorities' rescue plan and put it into practice.

My rescue will depend on my being present in the shelter the authorities have indicated. But to get there I must do several things. I must believe that the warning is real. I must believe that the authorities are represented by these people, and then I must trust these representatives. I must accept the plan containing the rescue instructions as the authorities have drawn it up, and put it into practice.

In everyday life the link between what we hear, what we believe and the actions that follow from what we believe is very clear. I may be grateful and thankful to the one who informs me that my life is in danger, but if I do nothing after hearing, even if I believe him, I will lose my life.

It is the same when it comes to saving the soul from eternal death. Very many hear about the danger of losing their soul, and when they are called to save themselves, they remain in a passive faith that requires them only to believe in Christ's work on the cross and to be thankful to Him.

What happened in the days of Noah is happening now too.

At the time when the flood was imminent, God's part consisted first in informing Noah of what He was going to do with mankind. Then He gave him detailed instructions on how and what he must do to save himself and his family. (And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits... Genesis 6:15).

Noah's part was not merely to believe God about what was to come. God did not ask of him only a mental, passive faith; He set his faith to work. (Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he. Genesis 6:22) This faith of Noah carried out everything God had commanded him.

So it is in our case too. The Lord Jesus informs us of the wrath to come, which will be poured out on the whole world. Then, for our rescue, He gives us precise instructions, which we must follow closely.

We must work for our rescue with a holy fear, as Noah worked on the ark; otherwise the faith we have in His sacrifice is of no use to us at all. (But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:20)

In the illustration above, the storm symbolizes the wrath of God that will come upon mankind, the authorities' instructions are the teachings of Christ, and the shelter is abiding in the Word of Christ. (If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. John 8:31)

The Lord Jesus warns us about the end of a passive faith, a faith that does not work, which is dead. (And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. Luke 6:46-49)

In the pages that follow, we will try to bring out through the Word of Scripture the inseparable link between faith and obedience, the works of faith, which is the part that falls to the person who enters into covenant with God.

Living Faith – the Works of Faith

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) This means that I must meet the Lord Jesus, hear Him, admire Him, love Him and trust in Him, trust in His Words. (And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. Mark 4:20)

True faith involves an unshakeable trust in Christ and in the heavenly things He brought. (Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1)

We must understand that all the words, the commandments, of the book of the New Covenant are binding, not optional. Faith is called to work, or in other words, it is called to keep the Word of Christ. (For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, ... and they have kept thy word. John 17:8, 6)

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:3, 4)

The Lord's words that we find in the Gospel are not a collection of texts to make us better informed; they are teachings, commandments, that will put our faith to work and to the test. E.g. "but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matthew 5:39)

The sacrifice on the cross will be of no use to us if we do not take heed to the content of the book of the New Covenant, which is in fact the Word of Christ. (He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. John 12:48)

Our part: In this covenant made between God and man, faith must work together with works. God cannot work with a dead faith. (For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh. Galatians 5:6; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5)

The work of salvation, of perfection, is the Lord's, but He does not work alone; He works together with the works of our faith, done in obedience to His commandments. (Seest thou how faith wrought with his works. James 2:22)

The Lord Jesus tells us that if anyone hears His Words and keeps them, he has built his house on the rock. And whoever hears and does not do them has built his house on the sand. (And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Luke 6:46)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24); "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." (John 8:51)

The works of our faith, which result from keeping the Lord's commandments, have the role of forming our character, so that at the end of the race on earth it may be like that of the Lord Jesus. (Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? James 2:22; giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge. 2 Peter 1:5)

Faith works together with our works, and through what we do in obedience to Him, it will mould the image of Christ in us. The works of faith are not done to redeem ourselves, or to appease God, nor are they done to obtain a reward; they are the works of obedience to everything the Lord Jesus says, so that we may become like Him.

The works of faith work on our character, which must be built step by step. Just as Noah's ark was built according to precise instructions, where not a single plank could be missing, so the image of Christ must be built in us.

God works on every detail, and this can be done only if we have the status of a bond-servant, through the works of obedience to all His instructions, His commandments.

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." (Romans 6:22); "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Through this faith that works, we submit our will to the One who is "our Lord", and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, doing what He tells us, we take on little by little the character of the Lord Jesus; we put on a new garment. (... to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen... for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. Revelation 19:8)

The cross will be of no use to us if, on the new road, faith does not work together with our works. (What doth it profit ... though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? James 2:14)

So it was in olden times, when the Jews benefited from God's strong hand in their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. But this did not bring them into Canaan.

The Word of God tells us that it profited them nothing, because on the road to Canaan He found no faith in those who had benefited from His grace. (For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed

with faith in them that heard it. Hebrews 4:2; ... they could not enter in because of unbelief. Hebrews 3:19)

Without an unshakeable trust in Him to the end of our road, we will not be able to please Him. (... which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. Luke 8:13)

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel... which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:1, 2)

To be added:

For most people, the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 remains a mystery. (Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1)

Most think that they must have an unshakeable trust in the material things that may exist in the Kingdom of God, or in God's promises. Few understand that we must have an unshakeable trust in the heavenly things that concern the spiritual life of the Kingdom of God. (If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? John 3:12)

The heavenly things found in the Kingdom of God appear in the Scripture under the name of the things of God or the things of the Spirit. These things are a faithful picture both of the nature of the Kingdom and of the heart of God.

The things above fall into two categories. In the first category we find the commandments of Christ, which are the raw material, and in the second category we find the things that define the fruit of the Spirit, which are the finished product. The Holy Spirit urges us to keep the Lord's commandments, and if we let ourselves be led by Him, we will come to have the fruit of the Spirit. Many have heard about the fruit of the Spirit, but few have experienced walking in the things above, which are the fruit of the Spirit. They can be truly known only if we experience them by keeping the commandments of Christ. (Now the end of the commandment is charity. 1 Timothy 1:5; And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. 2 John 1:6)

The Word of Scripture tells us to seek the things of the Kingdom of God, the things above, not the things on the earth, the things below, because these things change our character and bring peace. (If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, ... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:1, 2)

The things above, prepared by God for us to walk in them so as to acquire the character of Christ, are totally different from the things of the world; they are things that do not reach the mind of the spiritually dead person. (Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9)

The things above, though they are so simple, are opposed to the things man seeks; to many of us they are foolishness. (But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him. 1 Corinthians 2:14) The Lord Jesus gives us as an example the city of Jerusalem, which did not know the heavenly things He brought, things that could have given it peace. (If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. Luke 19:42)

By this statement the Lord Jesus warns us in the most serious way that many of us will be in the same situation.

With sadness we notice that for many, the Kingdom of God and the things in it remain a mystery, and they do not manage to know them.

Take great care! If we praise God with our lips for what He did for us on the cross, believing that this is enough, and we do not accept that we must deny ourselves and submit to the commandments of Christ, we have a dead faith, only a passive faith that does not save.

We show unbelief if we do not believe that keeping His commandments is an obligation that falls to us in this new covenant. (... every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation... Hebrews 2:2, 3; giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue... 2 Peter 1:5; Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. Matthew 3:8)

Drawn by the Beauty of Christ - the New Covenant

In more and more evangelical congregations today it is claimed that this faith in the sacrifice on the cross is my part in the covenant I make with the Lord. There is a general lack of interest in knowing the content, the commandments, of the New Covenant.

And as for fulfilling these commandments, they are not considered binding for salvation.

In olden times, God delivered the people from the harsh bondage of Egypt and then made a covenant with them, by which He bound Himself to bring them into the land of Canaan.

The Scripture says that God gave through Moses a book of the covenant (containing His conditions), which the people had to accept and bind themselves to fulfil. (And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. Exodus 24:7). See Exodus 24:3, 9;

Today God makes a new covenant with us, and for this He has given through the Lord Jesus the book of the New Covenant, which is the Gospel, the Word of Christ. (... and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. Deuteronomy 18:18, 19)

In this New Covenant (Hebrews 8:13) we have God's commitment that He will bring us into His Kingdom and give us eternal life, but not unconditionally. Our commitment in this covenant, this contract, must likewise be submission and fulfilment. To be able to enter into this covenant with the Lord, I too will have to say: All that the Lord has said I will do, and I will obey.

God promises us to begin this work of salvation with us and to bring it to a good end. (being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it. Philippians 1:6)

He will do this only if the person accepts the obligations that fall to him, that is, to come into submission and keep the commandments given to him. (If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. John 8:51; He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life. John 5:24)

So God's part in this covenant consists of:

– the work of Christ on the cross (in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:14),

– the work of His Word "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. ... And this is the word

which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Peter 1:23, 25); the word of God, which effectually worketh... 1 Thessalonians 2:13) and

- the work of the Holy Spirit (... by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Titus 3:5; through sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2)

Our part in the covenant made with God is:

- faith in Him, which means to trust in Him, in His work and in His Word. (...he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 1 Peter 2:6; For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them. John 17:8; As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; John 8:30, 31)
- our repentance, which means becoming aware of our sinful state, sorrow, and renouncing the life of the past. (... ye have put off the old man with his deeds. Colossians 3:9)
- self-denial, which means to acknowledge Him as Master with full authority. I must submit my own will to the will of Christ and give up governing my life myself. (... not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. John 6:38; If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23) I must accept that the teachings of Christ lead me step by step every day. (...I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Galatians 2:20)

The Sacrifice on the Cross

We notice that in our days there is much confusion about the role of Christ's sacrifice. Some believe that it is enough just to believe in the sacrifice on the cross, since all that is needed for salvation is what the Lord Jesus did on the cross as Saviour.

And others rely on their works, and end up disregarding the work of the cross.

In the first case, a person considers that he can do nothing for his salvation but rely on the work of the cross, attaching no importance to the Word of Christ and to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In other words, the teachings of the Lord Jesus and the work of the Spirit are not necessary for the salvation of the soul.

In this way the Lord's teaching is moved to a secondary, optional level. Discipleship too is something optional, not part of the process of salvation. In the second case, the emphasis is put on works, neglecting the part of the cross and the part of the work of the Spirit. (... going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3)

So as not to find ourselves in one extreme or the other, it is very important to know what the role of the sacrifice on the cross is! To know what place the cross has in the plan of salvation.

We believe it is very clear to everyone that sinful man could not pay the price of redemption through his good works. (Ephesians 2:9)

Someone without sin had to die for this, and that one was the Lord Jesus. (... holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Hebrews 7:26)

The Scripture tells us that so that we could be set free from the dominion of the Devil, so that we could be washed from our sins, so that we could be reconciled to God, so that we could be redeemed, and so that the making of the New Covenant and our translation into His Kingdom would be possible, the Son of God agreed to die on the cross. (... to give his life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28)

The work of the cross is God's gift to every person who enters into covenant with the Lord and repents of his evil deeds, who denies himself and trusts in Him. The sacrifice on the cross makes possible the forgiveness of sins and redemption. (who... hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13)

The cross does this so that we can be placed in a new state, in which He can work with us through the Holy Spirit for our restoration. (... through sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2; are changed into the same image... even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18) The cross makes possible the beginning of discipleship, the entry into His school.

While we are in the process of being changed into His image, the sins committed unwillingly are cleansed for us by the blood of Christ. (but if we walk in the light... we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us... 1 John 1:7)

The cross will be of no use to us at all if on the new road we sin knowingly. (For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, ... of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:26, 29)

The New Birth – the Beginning of Discipleship

In the teaching of the Lord Jesus, self-denial, the submission of one's own will, marks the beginning of discipleship, as indeed it marks the new birth. (If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23)

The new birth does not take place on hearing a message that stirs the emotions, without the Word of Christ, repentance, self-denial and faith being present. The new birth is not an emotional, inexplicable experience of the soul.

Just as every biological birth (whether of plants, of animals or of man) has a seed at its base, so it is with the new birth; it cannot come about unless it has the Teaching of Christ, the Seed, as its basic element.

Three main elements take part in the birth of a plant: the seed, the soil and the water. As with the birth of a plant, the Scripture also speaks of three elements that take part in the new birth.

The heart of man is likened to the ground. (But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8:15)

The Word of Christ, His teachings, from which life springs, is the Seed. (The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11; Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth. James 1:18)

The Holy Spirit is the third, indispensable element. Just as the plant does not sprout from the seed if it has no water, so without the Holy Spirit the new life does not begin. (... and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Titus 3:5)

The Lord Jesus tells us that only if we hate the old man, if we abandon the old things, will we be able to begin a new life, and this will be a life of discipleship, of being His bondservant. (If any man come to me, and hate not... his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:26) The new birth does not come about unless I give up the old man and submit to Christ. (ye have put off the old man with his deeds. Colossians 3:9)

The Lord enters into covenant with us only when we give up our own will and agree to submit to the Teachings of Christ.

From this moment the life of discipleship begins. We become His disciples from the day we accept Him in all things as Teacher and Lord. To be a disciple of Christ means to be enrolled in His school, to learn from Him the new things, the things above, and to make them your own, since they are strictly necessary to you for the life of the Kingdom. We become His disciples from the first day of school, from the first day of the new life.

The Lord's command to the apostles was: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Or in other words, He sent them to go and make disciples and enrol them in His school.

If we look at the activity of the apostles, this is exactly what they did. (... when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many... Acts 14:21)

They taught people to deny themselves, to submit to Christ and to keep what He commanded. Whoever did this became a disciple in the school of Christ. (And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. Acts 11:26)

In the school of Christ we are bondservants of God; we are subject to Him in all things, so that we may come to our sanctification. (being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Romans 6:22)

The new birth is the beginning of the life of a disciple, and the result of discipleship and of God's work is man in the image and likeness of God.

Take care! If one of these elements is missing, such as the Word, the seed, repentance, faith and submission, there can be no talk of a new birth and of the beginning of the life of discipleship, where Christ is Teacher and Lord.

The Word of Christ

The Scripture tells us that we are born of the Word of Christ, which is living and active. (being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. 1 Peter 1:23, 25) If, when the Words of Christ, the seed, are sown in us, we make the decision to obey and submit, the new life will begin. (... receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21; Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. John 5:24) "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14) will come to dwell and work in our heart. (If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. John 8:31; the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The Holy Spirit will use the Words of the Lord and will work with us, which will make the new life grow and bear fruit. (... the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. John 14:26)

According to the Scripture, real faith cannot come unless we hear the Word of Christ. (So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17)

We must know and understand what we are called to, and, fully aware, count the cost carefully, whether we want to walk this road or not. (whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33)

If, on hearing the Word of Christ, we do not understand what we are called to, the wicked one comes and takes away the Word, the seed, and the birth can no longer come about. (When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. Matthew 13:19)

The Purpose of the Word

The book of the New Covenant contains no useless teachings that were written only for the Jews or for other times. The New Covenant contains the commandments, the teachings, of Christ, which are strictly necessary to us for the forming of His image in us. (the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. Proverbs 4:4)

Each teaching has its role; none can be set aside; all are equally important; only through them can I reach perfection. (... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48)

Some are for obtaining patience, others for obtaining kindness, others for having a pure heart, others for having meekness, etc. Each contributes its part to the forming of the image of Christ in me.

The aim of the Lord's words, His teachings, is that we should be like Him. (Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. 1 Timothy 1:5; And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. 2 John 1:6; God is love. 1 John 4:16)

We list a few: do not judge, do not condemn (Matthew 7:1); forgive the one who wrongs you (Matthew 18:21); do not be angry (Matthew 5:22); be meek, lowly (Matthew 11:29); be longsuffering (Matthew 24:13); love even your enemies (Matthew 5:44); do not resist the one who does you evil; if he takes your goods by force, do not ask for them back; give to the one who asks of you (Matthew 5:39, 42); do not separate what God has joined together, do not remarry while your spouse is living (Mark 10:11); if your eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out (Matthew 5:29); do not lay up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19); do not slander (Matthew 18:10); bless (Matthew 5:44); do not use idle words (Matthew 12:36), when you give a feast, call the poor... (Luke 14:13); "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: ... I was a stranger, and ye took me in." (Matthew 25:35); do good to those who hate you (Matthew 5:44);

We Will Illustrate Three Teachings

Paying taxes: "Is it lawful for us to give tribute (taxes) unto Cæsar, or no?" Then He said to them: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's" (Luke 20:22, 25) This commandment teaches us to be subject to the authorities and not to steal; it teaches us to pay our taxes when a service is provided to us or we provide one, when we rent out or rent an apartment, when we have our house painted, or when we build something.

It teaches us not to join with people who do not pay their taxes, who do undeclared work (When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him. Psalm 50:18), and to pay our taxes on all our wage income. (... rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6)

Speaking evil – Blessing: "Take heed that ye despise not..." (Matthew 18:10); "Put them in mind ... to speak evil of no man." (Titus 3:1-2) So we are forbidden to speak evil of anyone, whether close to us or a stranger. We can examine ourselves: if we are dis-

pleased with someone and tell tales about him to someone else, then we are still practising evil-speaking. But the Lord's teaching does not end here.

On the contrary, He commands us to bless all people, even our enemies! (But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you. Matthew 5:44) By this the Lord asks us to replace slander with blessing. Let us check ourselves: Is blessing our way of life?

"but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9) Have we answered the Lord's call, so as to be among the chosen? (For many are called, but few are chosen. Matthew 22:14) Or are we bold and unafraid to speak evil of others? (Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel... durst not bring against him a railing accusation. Jude 1:8)

This teaching was given to us to form His character in us. If we speak evil of our brother, our neighbour, the government, the state,... we will go on having the character of the one who now works in the children of disobedience. We will be among those who do not inherit the Kingdom of God. (... nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:10)

If we are subject to the Lord's teaching, then we bless all people. Take great care: "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matthew 12:36, 37)

Non-resistance: "him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." (Luke 6:29); "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." (Matthew 5:40)

We can check ourselves: If we are among those who say that this teaching (or perhaps other teachings too) is going too far, and if we believe that we may resist those who do us evil, if we believe that we may go to law over houses, land, etc., then we still do not trust His Word, nor are we subject to the Lord. The new life has not yet begun. (This is an hard saying; who can hear it? From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. John 6:60, 66) Let us take care, for many have fallen at this test. do good to them that hate you (Matthew 5:44);

God's Plan

Before the foundation of the world, God planned that the man He would create should be like Him. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: ... So God created man in his own image." (Genesis 1:26, 27)

At the fall into sin, man lost the image of God. But in the plan God made in eternity there was also a programme for restoring His image in us. (Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. Psalm 40:7)

"he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Romans 8:29)

"he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him." (Ephesians 1:4)

That is why His Son came into our world: to restore what was lost in the garden of Eden, to teach us and help us rebuild this image of His in such a way that in the end we come to be like Him, so that we may be found worthy of the eternal Kingdom. (Strive to

enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Luke 13:24)

The purpose for which the Lord Jesus came is to fulfil God's plan, to save all people who want to be saved. That is why He works with us through His word and through the Holy Spirit to restore what was lost. When we enter His school, He offers us all the help needed in this process of restoration.

The image of Christ in us will be our salvation. (Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27; ...until Christ be formed in you! Galatians 4:19)

Those who understand this plan and accept it will take part and work together with God in restoring their character after the heavenly pattern. (For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:10; ...we are labourers together with God. 1 Corinthians 3:9)

We have no other calling on earth than the restoring of the image of God in us, so that we may dwell in eternity with the saints, with those who are conformed to the image of His Son, people of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

God's plan is to dwell together with those who are passionate about being like Him (full of kindness...), with those who put on the new man, created after His image. (and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created. Ephesians 4:24;) But how does the Scripture describe the image of God?

The Wedding Garment

A person can be described from two perspectives: by his outward appearance, his face, or by his character, his heart. In the first case it is a matter of the outward image, which can be known with the physical eyes, and in the second it is a matter of the inward image, his heart, which can be known with the eyes of the mind, by his way of being, by his character.

As regards the description of the image of God, He cannot be described by an image that strikes the eye, but only by His character, His heart (1 Samuel 13:14). When Moses wanted to know Him, he did not ask to see His outward appearance with his eyes; he asked Him to show him His way of being. (Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee... Exodus 33:13)

So God revealed to him His attributes, His character. (And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Exodus 34:6); "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." (Psalm 145:8)

The Word of Scripture also describes Him thus: "He is the Rock, ... for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4) "God is love" (1 John 4:16)

When God tells us that His image must come into being in us, He is in fact telling us that His attributes, His character, must be imprinted in us.

He works at restoring His image in us, and He guides us by the Holy Spirit so as to clothe us with His attributes, with the things above. These attributes with which we must be clothed are the wedding garment; if we do not have it, we will be cast into outer

darkness. (And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? Matthew 22:12)

We must put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man, which is created after the image of God. (and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created. Ephesians 4:24)

The new clothing has woven into it kindness, patience, meekness, love, mercy... (Put on therefore, ... bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ... And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Colossians 3:12, 14)

This new clothing is the clothing of the heart, which makes me like the Lord Jesus.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Kindness, patience and love must come into being in us, and they are obtained by keeping the Word of Christ under the guidance of the Spirit. (are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18)

He who began this good work in us will bring it to a good end through His Word and through the Holy Spirit. (For we are his workmanship. Ephesians 2:10) He gave His Son to die so that we could be forgiven, He sowed the seed (the Word of Christ) from which life springs, and He also gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit for our renewal and for our growth. (... and renewing of the Holy Ghost... Titus 3:5; ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:38)

The Holy Spirit works throughout our whole life for our sanctification; He becomes our guide, He urges us and directs us. He works with the help of the Lord's teachings to make us grow, so that we obtain the result God desires, that is, His image. (... through sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2)

The teachings of the Lord Jesus are indispensable for imprinting His attributes in us, for remodelling us after His image.

The Holy Spirit will take each teaching in turn and work with us for our perfection (Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. John 16:13; he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit does not come into us to sit somewhere in a corner of the heart, unnoticed, without our letting Him become involved in our life.

He comes only in the position of leader, and only when we agree to submit to Him. That is why God tells us to aim at being governed wholly by His Spirit. (be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18) He comes and takes over our life and works in it to put His fruit in us. (... Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Galatians 5:16)

The Spirit works with us and supports us in our weaknesses. He understands our weaknesses and helps us by interceding for us. (Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26)

But if we do not want to walk in obedience to His promptings, then He cannot help us in our weaknesses. In this way we will stop the work of the Spirit. He will not force us to work if we do not want to. (Quench not the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19)

Only if we let ourselves be prompted by the Spirit of Christ and seek the things of the Spirit as a pearl of great price will He guide us so that we obtain them. (... to be spiritually

minded is life and peace. Romans 8:6; they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Romans 8:5)

Where there is new life, there the firstfruits will appear as the result of the work of the Spirit. (... which have the firstfruits of the Spirit. Romans 8:23) So we can easily check whether the Spirit dwells in us.

The Scripture tells us that we receive the Spirit not to live for ourselves, but to come to resemble the Lord, to have love, and to be of profit to others. (Charity ... seeketh not her own. 1 Corinthians 13:5; But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 1 Corinthians 12:7)

We must understand what the things of the Kingdom are, the treasures of the Kingdom, receive them, give up the old things and replace them with the treasure found, that is, the things, the fruit, of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Galatians 5:22) Then we must give up self-love, the life lived for ourselves. (For none of us liveth to himself... Romans 14:7)

We will begin a new life with the new things of the Kingdom. We will begin to work at the restoring of our character, at the wedding garment, guided by the Spirit of God (And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Ephesians 4:24)

When the new life begins, we have other concerns, other results. (if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new... all things are of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17, 18)

Every day we are in His workshop; we work together with Him at being changed into His image. Through obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, and through the Word of the Gospel, the fruit of the Spirit will take shape in us.

Temperance:

One fruit of the work of the Spirit is temperance. If we submit to the promptings of the Spirit, He works with us so that we are sanctified, crucify the lusts, do not think evil, are not angry, etc. (... through sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2)

When we are tempted, the Spirit will bring to our remembrance the Lord's words; He will urge us to add works to faith. Then He will guide us, so that we can manage to turn our thoughts away from vain things and flee from the lust of the eyes. (ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:22)

Our part is to crucify the old man with his passions and lusts (the works of the flesh, the lust of the eyes), to work at the restoring of His image in us together with the Holy Spirit, to put on the new man. (And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. Matthew 5:29)

To crucify the flesh, the Lord will give us as a help, besides the Holy Spirit, the members of the body of Christ as well. (1 Corinthians 12) That is why we cannot keep company with just anyone; we must be only in that Church where purity is practised and sin is not tolerated.

There we will be helped by the Holy Spirit and by the other members to grow and to crucify the old flesh. We must be together with those who do not love the world nor the things of the world. Their abstaining from the things of the world (e.g. going to the seaside, evil-speaking, watching television and the internet, undeclared work, bribery, etc.) will help us to put off the old man. (Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22)

We can ask ourselves: Have we begun to seek the things of the Spirit as a treasure? Are they a daily priority? Do we have the firstfruits of the Spirit? Do you have temperance

as a fruit of the work of the Spirit? Have patience and kindness appeared? Whoever has the Spirit also has His fruit. (Ye shall know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:16) Do not deceive yourself into thinking that you can have the Spirit if you do not also have His fruit.

If we have given up a few sins (drinking, smoking, parties), read the Bible, sing, pray and have Bible studies, but still live for ourselves and do not seek the things of the Spirit, then we can be sure that the new life has not yet begun.

Longsuffering

This is one of the "attributes of God" that He wants to imprint in us. This attribute, with which we must be clothed, is obtained at the prompting of the Spirit, through submission to the Word of Christ. (He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. John 14:21) Let us look at the work of each party involved:

The Lord's part: First of all, the Lord Jesus is given to us as an example of patience. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6);

"In his humiliation his judgment was taken away." (Acts 8:33)

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." (1 Peter 2:21, 23)

The Lord Jesus gives us teachings, commandments, which oblige our faith to work with the works of faith. To clothe us with patience, He teaches us: "That ye resist not evil: ... And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." Matthew 5:39, 40; "him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." Luke 6:29)

If we accept and desire to keep this teaching without taking anything away from it, then whenever an injustice, a trouble or a persecution arises, the Holy Spirit will urge us to endure and will guide us, telling us what to do and what to say. (But when they deliver you up, ... the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. Matthew 10:19, 20)

God makes use of troubles, sufferings and injustices, these trials being strictly necessary to us for reaching "longsuffering".

"we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed." (Romans 5:3–5) "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire." (James 1:2–5)

When we are persecuted, the Holy Spirit will urge us to bless, to love those who persecute us and to pray to the Lord for them, that He may not lay their sin to their charge. To reach "longsuffering", the Lord shows us the limit up to which we must endure. (But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. Matthew 24:13)

Our part: To have this Fruit is possible only if we trust fully in Him, in His Word concerning non-resistance, forgiveness, love, blessing... and if we do exactly as the Holy Spirit urges us.

We must trust in the Lord's instructions as they are given. We must look at His example and follow His steps, doing as He did in His relationship with the Father and with people. (... because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. 1 Peter 2:21)

In everyday life we have to face many trials, injustices:

Many of them can be avoided by using the means the world has at hand. Or we will accept and keep the Lord's teachings, which will bear in us the fruit of patience, meekness, blessing, peace and love of enemies.

Perhaps a gallbladder attack (or something else) comes on and we have to go to the emergency hospital. Those who arrive after us use bribes and go in before us. The Lord forbids us to use bribes, because a bribe corrupts the heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:7)

All that is left for us is to endure this trial, this injustice, through extra hours of pain, until the Lord puts it on their heart to attend to us as well.

When the driver behind us crashes into us, tells us we are to blame, speaks rudely to us, strikes us... we must not resist but endure this trial. Likewise, if we are admitted to hospital for an operation, because we do not use bribes, we will have to bear the consequences.

Perhaps someone wants to go to law with us and take what is ours. If he takes something from us by force, let us not stop him from taking other things as well. (him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Luke 6:29)

The (unbelieving) wife says an inappropriate word to us, or perhaps takes from us our legitimate right as head of the house. Let us not stop her from taking the other rights as well; we must endure to the end in order to win our soul.

When legitimate rights are taken from us, we are called by the Lord Jesus not to resist by word or by other means (e.g. the courts) that we have at hand. The Lord calls us to endure to the end. (In your patience possess ye your souls. Luke 21:19)

We must keep the Lord's commandment exactly as it was given to us, practising non-resistance in all things. (That ye resist not evil. Matthew 5:39) This is how patience, which is the fruit of the work of the Spirit, will appear in us.

We must accept that any evil be done to us, even that our life be taken, without resisting. We must follow His steps. (For even hereunto were ye called: ... leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. 1 Peter 2:21)

The Lord will take us through the fire of the trial of faith, and the works of our faith in relation to the Lord's teaching about non-resistance will produce the expected fruit, that is, patience. (Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you. 1 Peter 4:12)

This unshakeable trust in His Word has as the end of faith the salvation of the soul. (receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9)

We must fulfil word for word everything He has commanded, without resisting, enduring in injustice, in suffering and in trouble. When we are persecuted, we must bless, pray for our persecutors and love them.

The work of perfection is His, but He does not work alone; He works together with the works of our faith. (Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? James 2:22)

Thus "the trying of your faith" works patience, which will have its perfect work in us so that we may be "perfect". (... knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire. James 1:3, 4)

He works with us and takes us through various trials, in order to make us grow. These trials, which will not be beyond our strength, will work the character of Christ in us. When a trouble, an injustice, comes, if we trust fully in Him and have a strong assurance that this trial is for our perfection, doing what He says, we will come out victorious.

We must trust God that He does not allow a temptation beyond our strength to come upon us. (There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

There are countless opportunities for obtaining this fruit. After we manage to endure small things, the Lord will allow harder trials into our life as well. In this way we will finally come to be clothed with longsuffering, which is the fruit of the work of the Word and of the Holy Spirit in our life.

It Is Fitting to Ask Ourselves a Few Questions:

Do we have a constant, daily concern for the things above? Are we concerned from dawn till evening to have patience and kindness?

And do we have the same concern for doing good, peace, faithfulness, meekness, love, temperance? Are we interested in being clothed with the wedding garment?

Are we aware that we have enrolled as disciples in the school of Christ? Do I have a daily priority in seeking the things of the Spirit? (And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23) **or:** Do we have concerns similar to those before our conversion, such as watching television, the internet, holidays at the seaside, bribery, undeclared work, unlicensed software... ?

Here is the difference between a child of God and a religious person.

The religious person has not entered this school-workshop; he is not interested in obtaining the image of Christ in himself. He does sporadic deeds, but without giving up his life, his self. He wants salvation without giving up the things of the world.

He does not work consciously to obtain the fruit of the Spirit, e.g. kindness and doing good, by seeking them as a treasure of great price. He has no interest in using the commandments God has made available to obtain this fruit. The religious person does not see that the Lord's commandments are for his perfection, for obtaining the wedding garment.

Doing good, kindness and love are three of the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. So a third of our daily concern for the things of the Spirit should be for doing good, kindness and love.

In order for us to have all the Fruit of the Spirit, the Lord gives us teachings and then gives us opportunities to put them into practice. Let us take as an example the Lord's teaching on doing good: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, ... do good to them that hate you." (Matthew 5:44); "do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again." (Luke 6:35); "... when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." (Luke 14:13);

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27) "And let us not be weary in well doing: ... As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men." (Galatians 6:9)

He finds us and gives us work: besides the brethren, the orphans, the widows, the stranger, the poor. These are part of the good works which God has prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

The Lord shows us that in the end our garment must also have woven into it "doing good", which is a fruit of the Spirit. Those who have done what He taught them are invited to the marriage of the Lamb. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me

meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:" (Matthew 25:34, 35)

The religious person comes to have decades of "repentance" and has not worked at all, or almost not at all, to obtain this fruit. Or rather, he has not been concerned to walk according to the promptings of the Spirit. Doing good was not a priority for him in every-day life. See this fruit in Tabitha. (Acts 9:36)

The religious person does not see that these teachings he avoids will cast him out, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Depart from me, ye cursed, ... for ... naked, and ye clothed me not; Matthew 25:41, 42)

Conclusion:

If we use our capacity to believe, placing full trust in Christ, giving up governing ourselves, submitting to His commandments, denying ourselves so as to do exactly what He tells us without turning aside to the right hand or to the left, then we have the faith by which we are pleasing to Him. This faith, which carries out everything it is told, will save us.

If our trust in Him is 99% and not 100%, this 1% of doubt, of unbelief, cannot let Him finish what He has begun. (Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Hebrews 3:12)

God cannot work in us if the faith we have in Him is only mental. Our part in this covenant is the denial of ourselves. Our faith must be 100% devoted to Him; otherwise He cannot work His image in us.

The book of the New Covenant contains all the teachings of Christ, and they are necessary to us for the forming of His image in us. (the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4) No teaching can be set aside. Each has its purpose; none was given at random. Some are for obtaining patience, others for obtaining kindness, others for having a pure heart, others for having meekness, etc.

Each teaching contributes its part to the forming of the image of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit will not leave any of them aside, and He will work with us according to our growth.

If we disregard even one teaching, such as non-resistance, the Spirit will not be able to work patience and kindness in us.

In that case His image in us could no longer be complete; it would be unfinished, imperfect. It is like a car that lacks the steering wheel, the brakes or something else: it would not work.

Consequently, on the day of the marriage of the Lamb we will not be clothed with a fitting garment. Patience and kindness will not be found woven into it. (to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen... for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. Revelation 19:8; "And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" "For many are called, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:12, 14)

May the Lord help us to understand what we are called to, so that we may have a share in the salvation of our soul. (...receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9)

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For every person, the most important thing in this life is to know the purpose for which he was created. It is extremely important to know why he is asked to repent, to deny himself and to believe the Word of Christ!

The Scripture shows us that, for the restoration of man, God has included in His plan these three things, which are integral parts of this process of salvation. As regards faith, we notice with sadness that today it is misunderstood by more and more people.