Petru Loga

Transformed into the Image of Christ

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

Bucharest 2023

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 8:29)

... warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man **perfect** in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. (Colossians 1:28-29)

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2nd edition

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But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

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Introduction

We come into the world, we prepare for life, we work, we have children and grandchildren, we enjoy this life more or less, and then everything ends at the grave. It seems that this is all life can offer us. On a closer look we can see that most people on the globe merely consume this life and are not concerned to find out whether there is anything more after death.

We believe that the most important thing in this short life we live is for each of us to know exactly God's plan concerning us human beings, to know what purpose God had when He created man.

Through this brochure we wish to offer you an answer concerning the purpose of this life we live on earth. We want what is written here to be a guide for those who believe in their heart that God is the Creator, both of the Universe and of us.

We notice that when we are asked to give an answer about what will be after this life is consumed and what we must do to live forever in the Kingdom of God, the great majority of people live in total ignorance.

Because of this ignorance, we can see today how many multitudes of people are manipulated by various theories that explain to us how one can reach the Kingdom of God.

One of them is the theory of purgatory. This theory, which we find in Catholicism, says that you can obtain the forgiveness of sins by paying for indulgences, something that assures you entry into the Kingdom of God and, with it, eternal life.

In Orthodoxy we find the memorial alms and the prayers for the dead, then the toll-houses through which the one who has died must pass, and many other things by which man hopes he will be able, in one way or another, to buy the forgiveness of sins.

Most of the evangelical, Protestant and neo-Protestant churches are in the same situation. 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 salvation, which is reduced to 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 man must do at the beginning of the life of faith. The Lord Jesus warns us that the lack of knowledge of the Scriptures is one of the things that keep man 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 stops here, without realizing that **God's plan** provides both for the restoration and

for the **perfection of man's character**.

Almost no one believes 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, ... 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.

Only Forgiven of Sins – Is This God's Plan?

In the pages that follow we set out to examine in detail God's plan, about which, if we are honest, we must confess that we did not learn very much when we began our spiritual search.

Each of us, when we came into a church, received from them glasses with a confessional doctrinal filter through which to read the Bible. We studied the Bible with their glasses, and they taught us what we must do to be saved.

Most of us were taught that God has done everything for us, that through faith in the sacrifice on the cross one obtains salvation, which is reduced to the forgiveness of sins. We were taught that **the perfection of character** cannot be reached during this life, and salvation is reduced to the work done on the cross.

Thus many have been convinced that after the new birth God is somewhere far away and is not much involved in man's life. Many understand that the work of the Holy Spirit with man is limited to a few outward things, such as speaking a few words in another tongue, a few miracles, prophecies, without the Holy Spirit being directly involved in the transformation of man in order to perfect his character.

So we are left to suppose that God will perfect us by some formula unknown to us, which He will apply after man's death.

And most of us remain more or less at this first part. We went to church, we had our seat, we confessed our sins, we were baptized, we sang, we upheld the teachings of the church we belong to, we lived a more godly life, we visited the sick, and so we will enter the Kingdom of God.

We were taught that we will not enter through what we do, but because we have obtained the forgiveness of sins by grace, through faith in His sacrifice, because there is no man without sin.

But in order to reach the heavenly Kingdom, in order to be saved, the standard of the Kingdom of God has very strict requirements; we must reach the perfection required by the status of a citizen of heaven. (Be ye therefore perfect,

even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48)

Man must have a credible answer to these requirements of God. So the question each of us must ask ourselves is: Do we also have a part in the work of salvation?

Concerning this part of ours, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures shows us the whole plan of God, whose objective is **the perfection of man.** Besides the forgiveness of sins, this plan provides for our growth as disciples in the school of Christ, until all reach the measure of the stature of His fulness.

Shortly after the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven, alongside the teaching of the Lord **(the doctrine of the perfection of man's character)**, Satan came with a counterfeit doctrine **(the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins)**, which offers a salvation without cost on man's part, limited only to the forgiveness of sins.

The teaching of Scripture tells us that, besides the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice on the cross, we must also reach the perfection of our character, something that requires the crucifixion of the flesh (putting off the old man) and the transformation of man (putting on the new man, made after the image of God).

It is enough for the disciple to be like his Teacher!

To reach the measure of the stature of Christ, the Holy Scripture teaches us that man must trust fully in the Word of Christ, then he must repent, deny himself and make a covenant of discipleship whose objective is that the disciple becomes like his Teacher. (It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. Matthew 10:25)

Any man, however simple he may be, understands that if someone reached the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, if he had His longsuffering, His love, His meekness... he would have free entry into the Kingdom of God. This is the only thing that can give us full confidence in the day of judgment.

Today there are very few people who accept and put into practice this doctrine of the perfection of man's character. (Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, 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 13:23,24)

On a closer look, we can easily notice that most choose to remain with the salvation that consists in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice on the cross.

The doctrine of atonement, or of the forgiveness of sins. Satan, through the people enslaved to him, has brought a teaching which says that God reduces salvation to the forgiveness of sins only, because man cannot overcome sin. In this false doctrine there are several offers by which you can be saved.

It is a first teaching, characteristic of the first centuries but very much alive today as well. It is a cheap offer with which Satan comes to the ignorant man who knows neither the Scriptures nor God's requirements. This teaching assures man that salvation is reduced to the forgiveness of sins only and is obtained through the payment of indulgences, memorial alms and rituals. (here we find Catholicism and Orthodoxy)

The sinful man who does not know the Word of God easily accepts this offer, because it lets him live his life in the flesh and assures him a cheap formula by which he can obtain salvation.

Another teaching, also cheap, convinces man that salvation is obtained "by faith alone," the price for the unconquered sins (past, present and future) having been paid by the Lord Jesus. (here we find the Protestant confessions, see the reformation of Luther, Calvin...)

This offer of Satan convinces man that the perfection of character during this life is not possible, and it too gives him a cheap formula by which to obtain salvation. You believe in the sacrifice on the cross and you obtain salvation, which is again reduced to the forgiveness of sins. (the Lord Jesus has paid)

There is also a third teaching, characteristic of the last centuries, which is closer to God's plan. It addresses the one who is not content with these cheap offers and who seeks more.

This teaching says that salvation can be obtained through faith in the sacrifice on the cross and through repentance, followed by a partial sanctification, without having as its objective self-denial, discipleship and reaching the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (here we find the neo-Protestant movement)

Incomplete sanctification does not bring man to the stature of the fulness of Christ!

In this doctrine we find, besides the new birth, a life of sanctification, but without victory over sin, the general conviction in this teaching too being that the perfection of character is not possible in this life.

It is easy to see that repentance followed by incomplete sanctification (a form of godliness), without self-denial, which still leaves room for living in the flesh as well and has no real completion, cannot bring man to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This is the case of the man who still keeps things of the flesh: anger, idle words, greed, undeclared work, slander, going to the seaside, wasting time on facebook, youtube...

It is quite clear that the man who embraces this teaching, in which unconquered sins remain, is forced to remain with the doctrine of the forgiveness

of sins. This assumes that God is to bring about the perfection by some unknown formula, at the moment of death or at the resurrection.

We can notice that Satan, in order to deceive the man who does not make salvation the goal of a diligent search, has used, besides memorial alms, indulgences..., the sacrifice on the cross as well, offering people a salvation without too great a cost on their part.

In order not to be deceived, it is very important that we examine what the role of the sacrifice on the cross is, that we know what place the Lord's sacrifice has in the plan of salvation.

The Sacrifice on the Cross – Its Role in the Plan of Salvation

The sacrifice on the cross is part of God's plan and has a well-defined place. We cannot diminish the importance of the sacrifice on the cross, because without it man cannot come to salvation.

God's plan provides for the restoration of sinful man, which includes cleansing from sins through the sacrifice on the cross. But God's plan is much more complex and is not limited only to the cleansing of sins through the sacrifice on the cross; it also has in view the perfection of our character. We believe it is very clear to everyone that sinful man could not pay the price of redemption by 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)

Scripture tells us that in order for us to be set free from the dominion of the devil, to be cleansed from sins, to be reconciled with God, to be redeemed, and to make possible the new birth and the translation into His Kingdom, the Son of God accepted 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 man who repents of his evil deeds, who denies himself and trusts in Him. Man cannot come with his works to obtain the forgiveness of sins. (For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9) 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 sacrifice of the Lord Jesus 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 and sanctification. (... 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 sacrifice on the cross makes possible the entry into the school of Christ and is the beginning of discipleship for whoever decides to deny himself and enter into covenant with the Lord. While we are in the process of change, until we reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, the sins committed accidentally, unwillingly, are cleansed for us by the blood of the Lord. (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 sacrifice of the Lord will be of no use to us if, after the new birth, after entering into the new covenant, we sin wilfully. (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)

God's Plan - The Restoration of His Image in Man

In order to know the things that are provided for in God's plan, we must examine the purpose the Lord had when He created man.

From reading Scripture we can see that in His eternal plan 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, who would be after 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 the one concerning 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. (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)

We have a soul, a spirit; He has endowed us 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.

But He did not limit Himself to this likeness alone. God created us and endowed us with these capacities in order for us to use them, and it is our responsibility to make good use of them, to work together with Him, in order to reach the stature He has determined.

God's plan is not limited merely to a cheap salvation, which consists only in repentance **(putting off the old man)** and the forgiveness of sins, but provides for **the restoration of God's image** in us **(putting on the new man)** and our being brought to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

This is the highest thing to which man can aspire. (and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Ephesians 4:24)

If the first man was deceived by Satan and his sin passed upon all, this does not mean that a mistake slipped into God's plan. All things happened as was foreseen in this plan made in eternity, which God set in order with great care 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 measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (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)

To illustrate this, we can think of the building of a car in a modern robotic factory, where the manufacturer has on the production line a point zero where he puts the first part. At the end of the manufacturing process the car comes out, worked and finished down to the smallest detail.

So it is also in God's factory: He begins this work of restoring His image in man, and He completes it down to the smallest details.

If man, created by God, can complete what he begins, how much more can God. God has the most advanced factory, in which He works together with every man who answers His call.

He gives us the new birth and transforms us step by step after His image, until we reach the measure of the stature of His Son. (But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18)

It is a perfect plan, drawn up with great precision, point by point, without the smallest detail missing. What He begins, He brings to a good end. (who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:8)

In God's plan it is provided that the Lord Jesus should have many brothers who are like Him. All the things that come into our life are provided by God to work on our character until we come to resemble the Lord Jesus. (... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28)

Our life on this earth, all that we do from morning till evening, must be subordinated to this great project of God. (If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:1)

If we do not do so, if we live this life in the flesh in order to enjoy it, we have in fact not understood God's work with man, and we will limit ourselves to Satan's offer, which holds out to us a cheap salvation consisting only in the forgiveness of sins. (For many walk, ... that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Philippians 3:18)

God, in His eternal plan, decided to make us His children, that we should grow and reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Beloved, now are we the sons of God, ... but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him.** 1 John 3:2)

We warn those who do not examine the Holy Scripture carefully, who do not understand that they must reach this status and are content with the forgiveness of sins alone, that on that great day they will have a great surprise, because in the Kingdom of God the Lord Jesus will be only with those who have prepared themselves and have reached the measure of the stature of His fulness!

Many think that this standard is too high for us, but this is our calling. The true God calls us to rise out of the corruption of this world, to come to have the image of Christ, because only so will we be able to dwell together with Him.

The Perfection of Man in God's Plan

To be able to carry out this extraordinary plan of making beings after His image, and to bring them to the perfection required by the status of His sons, God made the heavens and the earth, and man received a body from the dust of the earth. (... the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. Isaiah 45:18)

God did not choose the heavenly Kingdom as the dwelling place for man, as was the case with the angels, but He made the earth with all that is on it, this being the place that meets all the conditions for bringing man to the perfection He requires. It is a place that is not sheltered from dangers, since the devil and his angels were cast down to the earth.

There are some questions we can ask ourselves, whose answers are hidden from the inattentive eye: Why, when God created man, did He not place him directly in His presence, as the angels were placed? Why did He set him in the place where he was in danger of being influenced by the devil and his angels?

Why did God have to cast Satan down to the earth and not somewhere else? Why did He let him tempt man? Why did man, in his state of innocence, have to be such easy prey for Satan and come into this base condition in which billions of people find themselves today?

Longsuffering can be obtained only by learning from Christ!

We must observe that God's plan was perfect, it had no mistakes, a plan which He is now carrying out. (... his work is perfect. Deuteronomy 32:4)

On a more careful reading of the Bible, we can easily notice that in His perfect plan the fall of man was foreseen. (... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world ... Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ ... Ephesians 1:4) We can also notice that in His plan both the restoration of man (the new birth) and his perfection were provided for.

Thus God created the perfect setting for man, living on earth in the presence of Satan, to be put through various trials without which the stature required by the Kingdom of God cannot be reached. (Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21)

Man, the being created as the crown of His creation, after His image and likeness, was set to dwell in this visible world (the universe seen with our eyes) in the presence of Satan. This was not a mistake on God's part, but it was foreseen with great care in His eternal plan.

God created this visible universe, the earth and all the constellations of

heaven, to fulfil His purpose with people, that of bringing them to the stature of the Lord Jesus, His Firstborn, to the perfection of our character.

It is the ideal place for man to be raised, tried, proved and brought to the perfection God requires. It is amazing to see how perfect His plan is.

We can see that the Lord Jesus too was made perfect through the things with which He was tempted by Satan and which He overcame. The Lord Jesus was made perfect through the suffering that came from Satan, whom He overcame through His death on the cross. (For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10)

When we look at the life of the natural man, we notice that no man is born perfect; perfection is obtained only by tenacious work, by persevering, by copying the one who teaches us in every detail. (consider the road a pianist travels to become perfect at the piano)

The perfection of our character is obtained only through work; it is not a state we are born with, or one that will be given to us after we die.

We can observe that in no field of practical life can one reach perfection merely by studying, without practising what one studies. How much less can one reach the perfection required by the status of a son of God through a mental, passive faith, which Scripture likens to the faith of the devils. (Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:19, 20)

We are changed from beauty to beauty after the image of Christ!

When the rich young man asked the Lord Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life, we see that the Lord Jesus answers his question and makes the inheritance of eternal life conditional on the state of perfection he must reach.

The Lord Jesus answered him firmly: "If thou wilt be perfect, ... come and follow me." (Matthew 19:21). That is: leave the cares of life, come and live as I live, learn from Me, follow Me in all things, and you will become perfect and so you will inherit eternal life.

You cannot become perfect at the piano only by the theoretical study of the scores, without copying the teacher and without giving much time of your life to practical exercise. In the same way, our faith can become perfect only by practising it, through the works of faith. (Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? James 2:22)

In spiritual things, **to perfect your character,** to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, you must believe that it is possible; then you must work,

imitating or copying the Teacher in all He does, and give time from your life living out His teachings in practice, down to the smallest detail. (let us think how many hours a day a pianist works to become perfect)

It is easy to see that if man had been perfect at creation, as is the One who created him, there would have been no need for him to be placed on the earth in the presence of Satan; he would have dwelt directly in heaven in the presence of God.

But to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, the work of a disciple who copies the Teacher must be done. Only so can one reach the state of perfection required by the standard of the Kingdom of God.

The perfection God requires is not in music or in painting; it is perfection in longsuffering, in kindness, in meekness, in love... and this is obtained only by following the school of Christ, imitating Him.

God's work is completed only as it was with the Lord Jesus, through victory over the trials that come upon us. (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, wanting nothing. James 1:2-4)

The perfection of our character is not obtained through faith in the sacrifice on the cross, but through real work and struggle in the temptations that come from Satan and that are permitted by God for our growth.

So that man can overcome these trials, he has God as his partner, who is faithful and who will not allow a trial greater than man's strength to come upon him. (... but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

It is easy to see that the traits of the Lord Jesus, namely love, meekness, longsuffering, kindness... can be obtained only through work, through perseverance... having the Lord Jesus as our model. (... learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. Matthew 11:29)

No man, when he is born again, is born with longsuffering, with meekness, with love. These qualities can be obtained through man's work in cooperation with God. For this we have at our disposal the school of Christ, in which we find the Word that works with us, the Holy Spirit who urges and guides us, the Body of Christ (the Church), and our own work in full obedience.

The Shaping of God's Image in Us

What an extraordinary plan God was able to make! What grace we have,

that we can work in His workshop as disciples, together with Him, to grow in all things until we reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Because His plan is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son, and everything is subordinated to this magnificent plan, God sent His Son. He in turn sent His disciples to describe His character to us, because only if we know His traits will we be able to shape ourselves after His image. (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)

Just as no sculptor in the world, however talented he may be, can sculpt a man's likeness if he does not see the features of his face, so no one will be able to work at having the image of Christ if he does not know the features of His image.

No one in this world can conceive that a sculptor could reproduce the likeness of Nero if he had never seen Nero.

A sculptor who makes a work of sculpture always has as his model the face of the one he will reproduce in stone. In his workshop he has the image of the model, at which he must look, and he reproduces each feature with great care, until the stone takes on the image of the model.

God's work with us is similar. From the moment of the new birth, the Holy Spirit, like a sculptor, is the One who works together with us and transforms us step by step until Christ takes shape in us.

At the beginning, His image will be found in the seed of God that is sown in us, which has God's genetic code. The Holy Spirit makes this divine seed germinate and works together with us at this transformation.

For this He puts at our disposal the model, that is, the image of the Lord, at which we can look as in a mirror, as the Holy Scripture tells us. Then we work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, step by step, until we come to have the image of Christ, until all His features are imprinted on our heart.

We all look as in a mirror, in which we see all the features of the Lord, and we will keep polishing until there are no more differences between us and our Model. (But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18)

The outward face of the Lord cannot be seen, but the inward image can be seen: what His heart is like, what is in His heart, and this we can see with the eyes of our heart. (... the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. Ephesians 1:17-18)

There is an inner part of the heart in which we can resemble God and which can be seen only with the eyes of the heart, but most people pay no attention to it. (For this people's heart is waxed gross, ... And their eyes they have closed; Lest

at any time they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And should understand with their heart, And should be converted, and I should heal them. Matthew 13:15)

When Moses wanted to know Him, he did not ask to see His outward appearance, but asked Him to show him His ways, His way of being, that is, the traits of His heart. (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)

Therefore God revealed to him the hidden face of His heart, that is, the qualities or traits of His heart. (The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Exodus 34:6; The LORD is ... Slow to anger. Psalm 145:8; God is love. 1 John 4:16; A God of truth and without iniquity, Just and right is he. Deuteronomy 32:4)

When God tells us that His image must take shape in us, He is in fact telling us that our heart will have to change to be as His heart is; His qualities/the traits of His heart must be imprinted on us.

If we admire Him and love Him, the desire will be awakened in us to have His traits!

When we look with the eyes of the heart, we must see as in a mirror the traits of His heart, and we must let ourselves be worked on and shaped after these traits of His, so that at the end of the Spirit's work our heart will be like His. (... the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart... 1 Samuel 13:14)

He works at restoring His image in us and guides us by the Holy Spirit in order to clothe us with His qualities, which will be the fruit of the Spirit's work with us. (Put on therefore, as the elect of God, ... bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. Colossians 3:12)

In the Gospel we find the traits of the heart of the Lord Jesus, with which He draws all men to Himself. (And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:32)

But we can notice that in most people Satan has blinded the eyes of the heart, so that they do not see the Gospel of the beauty of Christ, who is the image of God, shining, so that they do not see in the mirror the Model after whom they should be changed. (But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 2 Corinthians 4:3)

Many of us have no eyes to see the image of Christ and remain only with knowing a few things about what the Lord Jesus did.

Many know what healings the Lord Jesus performed, they know about His

sacrifice on the cross, where He walked, what miracles He did, when He prayed, where He prayed, and the things concerning the Lord Jesus stop there; but what is essential, and what they must know for their salvation, they do not know.

We will have to understand that we will not be able to come to resemble Him/to be like Him if we do not seek to discover the beauty of the traits of His heart (His ways), and without desiring to have a heart like His. (... shew me now thy way, that I may know thee... Exodus 33:13)

Every commandment has hidden in it a trait of His!

The question each of us should ask ourselves is this: What can move me to look into the mirror and to work together with the Holy Spirit so that the image of the Lord is born in me? Is there something in particular? Is it the fear of hell? Is it the promise that He will take us to the heavenly Paradise? Or is it the beauty of His heart?

Drawn by the Beauty of His Heart

We can easily notice that in an election campaign for a candidate, those who promote him present him in the most brilliant light possible in order to convince people to choose him. The candidate composes speeches with the most convincing offers possible in order to move as many people as possible to choose him.

This is done because we were created with discernment, with the capacity to choose. When we greatly admire something, the desire to act, to make decisions, is set off in us.

No candidate in an election campaign will call us to choose him by using threats, because no one would appreciate him or choose him. If a man is drawn by the offers of a candidate who is very convincing, and considers him sincere in what he promises, he will act accordingly, he will appreciate him and choose him over the others.

If, besides the offers he makes, this candidate has a beautiful way of life, even if he does not call anyone to imitate his way of life too, there will still be some people who, out of admiration, will want to imitate him.

This is how we were created, with this capacity. When we are drawn to someone and admire him, then we are willing to support him, and when we admire him with all our heart, there will be people among us who will want to become like that person. We can see in young people these desires to imitate, to resemble certain music or film stars, in clothing, in speech...

So that people will choose the one who is running, he promises them various advantages, without asking them to become like him and to live as he does.

When it comes to the salvation of the soul, things happen in a similar way. God uses His messengers to present to us His plan for our life, with the purpose of convincing us to choose His offer of salvation.

The Lord Jesus, besides promising us eternal life, asks us to become like Him, to walk together with Him in His ways, living a perfect life.

He calls us not only to appreciate Him for what He has done for us, but He calls us to be like Him. He calls us to fall in love with Him, and for this He shows us the beauty of His character, which is perfect (And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:32)

God does not call us to appreciate Him only because He offers us an eternal Kingdom with streets of gold, because He rescues us from hell, since this will not move us to fall in love with Him, nor to want to follow Him in order to be like Him.

The Lord does not want us to become betrothed to Him out of self-interest; He does not promise us gifts to convince us to love Him, because this would set off opportunism in us, not true love. We notice that even people of the world disapprove of opportunism or "love" that is based on some other interest, not on

the beauty and qualities of the one who is loved.

Only if we are overwhelmed by His beauty will we want to walk in His ways and to have this beauty that He has. (The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, And called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Psalm 50:1, 2)

That is why, in His love for the crown of His creation, God uses His messengers to speak to us about the Lord Jesus, to show us what the character traits of His heart are. His disciples are sent to describe to us the image of God, to show us the beauty of His heart and to draw us to Him with His perfect beauty.

No one can be drawn by His beauty if he has not heard about Him and does not see the traits of His heart, if he does not know His ways, His way of being. (... how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14; No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. John 6:44)

If we are drawn by the beauty of His character, which is perfect, we will admire Him and love Him with all our heart; only so will the desire be stirred up in us to have the same character traits that He has. (I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, Until he please. Song of Solomon 8:4)

If we were called only to repentance so as not to end up in hell and so as to walk on streets of gold, without being shown the beauty of the Lord's heart as well, if it was not presented to us that His purpose is for us to have His character traits, we must be careful, because those who presented this message to us brought us a false, incomplete gospel. They were not sent by God. If we received such an opportunistic gospel, we have been deceived by Satan.

Let us acknowledge sincerely: What gospel was brought to us? Were there people who preached to us only that if we do not repent we will have our part in eternal hell?

Did they teach us to appreciate Him, to be thankful to Him only for what He did for us on the cross? Or were they messengers of God who presented to us the beauty of the Lord's heart as well? Was I drawn by His character traits? Was love awakened in us, and did we long to have the same beautiful traits as His?

God draws us with all His beauty, and He will make all the beauty of His heart pass before us. As He showed Moses the beauty of His heart, so He will show it to us as well. He will make all His beauty pass before you. (Exodus 33:19) He does this so that we will fall in love with the traits of His heart, so that love will be awakened in us.

David's fervent desire (which must be that of everyone who is in love with the Lord) was to dwell all his life in the house of the Lord in order to behold the beauty of the Lord. (One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the

LORD. Psalm 27:4)

If we come to God out of self-interest, out of opportunism, for the streets of gold, so that He will not punish us in hell, it is clear that we have had no part in the shining of the beauty of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Every teaching (commandment) of the Gospel has a trait of the Lord Jesus hidden in it; it hides in it the perfect beauty of His character. When we look at His ways, at His commandments, we are in fact looking at the beauty of Christ, who is the image of God.

His commandments must be a delight to us, because they represent Him. (And I will delight myself In thy commandments, which I have loved. Psalm 119:47; Yet thy commandments are my delights. Psalm 119:143)

That is why the Lord Jesus says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments..." (John 14:15), that is, whoever loves Me also loves My commandments and finds his delight in them, because My commandments express My character; they show what I am like.

No one will be able to admire Him and love Him with all his mind out of fear of the punishment of eternal hell, but only if he is drawn by the radiance of the Lord, by the radiance of His Word. Only so is the fervent desire to be like Him set off. Only in this way can the purpose for which we were created be reached, that of being like the Lord Jesus, our Bridegroom.

Only when we are truly drawn by the beauty of the Lord's heart will we be moved to imitate Him and to desire to have the same heart as His.

If someone shows us the beauty of the Lord and we are drawn to Him, the result will be love. By way of illustration, our relationship must resemble the relationship of two who are betrothed, who are drawn to one another, where there is love with all the heart.

If we admire and are drawn by the beauty of the traits of the Lord Jesus, we will desire them too, this being the starting point. (I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If ye find my beloved, That ye tell him, that I am sick of love. Song of Solomon 5:8)

A person in love will always delight in the words spoken by the one he admires and loves. (My soul failed when he spake. Song of Solomon 5:6; My soul breaketh for the longing That it hath unto thy judgments ... Psalm 119:20)

If we did not begin here, if we are not drawn by the beauty of His heart, if His commandments and His ways are not our delight, if we loved Him only for His promises, then the new life has not begun. (No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. John 6:44)

His Wife Has Made Herself Ready

In our relationship with the Lord Jesus, Scripture sees us in several roles. We are seen as disciples, as bondservants, as brothers of the Lord and as His betrothed. He is our Betrothed, and we are His betrothed! Let us ask ourselves: What relationship must there be between two who are betrothed? (... for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2)

It is clear that our relationship with the Lord must be a relationship of admiration, of love. The Word of the Lord often speaks of the fact that the Lord Jesus will be our Bridegroom and that we will be His bride (wife). (... Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. Revelation 21:9) The Lord loves me, and in His love He calls me to enter into a relationship of love, of betrothal with Him.

Only if love is awakened in us for the One who is more beautiful than all that exists in heaven and on earth, only then does the Lord too enter into a relationship with us. (I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, Until he please. Song of Solomon 8:4)

He comes to me and shows me His beauty, the beauty of His ways, and He has longsuffering toward me until love for Him and for His ways is awakened in me. When this happens on my part, He will enter into a relationship with me by making a covenant of love, so that I may be His.

It is not a covenant that the Lord forces me to make out of fear of the punishment of eternal hell (as most people make it today), but it is a covenant based on love, because I have come to love Him more than anything. (Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Ezekiel 16:8)

God knows the heart of man. He knows when we are drawn by His beauty, He knows when there is admiration, when there is love from the whole mind, and when my heart is ready to follow Him. Only then does He make a covenant of betrothal with me. (... he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him... John 14:21)

The beauty of the heart of the Lord Jesus must awaken in us what the beauty of her beloved awakened in the Shulamite, so that the fervent desire is born in us to love Him with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our mind. (What is thy beloved more than another beloved, That thou dost so charge us? My beloved is white and ruddy, The chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold... This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. Song of Solomon 5:9-16)

It is like a betrothal between a young man and a young woman, which one can enter only because of mutual admiration, because of love with all the heart. The fear of hell or the offers of paradise are excluded. He will not enter into this relationship of love with us if our time of love has not come, if we do not love Him more than mother or father, if we do not love Him more than anyone in this world. (He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:37)

This must be the only purpose of our life: to live this relationship of love and to prepare ourselves as a betrothed for our wedding with the Bridegroom. (... for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. Revelation 19:7)

We have been called to dwell together with our Bridegroom and with His Father! Because He obeyed the Father in all things, His wife too must obey Him in all things. Only then will the Father and the Son dwell together with me. (If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, **and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.** John 14:23)

His wife has made herself ready; she has become like Him. Now she is betrothed, she is in the school of her Betrothed, she walks in His righteous ways and learns to be godly toward Him, to obey Him, as He obeyed the Father. Through the trials she goes through, she reaches the stature of her husband. She will be made perfect, as her Bridegroom was made perfect. If He was made perfect, she too must be made perfect!

Let us ask ourselves: Could there be harmony in the Kingdom of God if the Son obeyed the Father exactly, but His wife did not obey in the same way? Would it be possible?

The Beauty of the Lord Jesus

It is essential that we know the traits of the Lord's heart, His way of being, His ways, the perfect beauty that the Lord Jesus has. (... to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2)

It is vital that we know His heart, because we will have to become like Him, because we will have to grow until we reach the measure of the stature of His fulness.

In God's plan, which was made before man existed, it was provided that His Son should come to earth to show us His ways, which are perfect. (Good and upright is the LORD: Therefore will he teach sinners in the way. Psalm 25:8; As for God, his way is perfect. Psalm 18:30)

He revealed His perfect beauty, with which He draws us to Himself, so that

we may fall in love with Him and desire to be like Him. (And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:32)

Nevertheless, the beauty of the Lord's heart and the way He walked are hidden from the eyes of most people. (because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Matthew 7:14)

The one Christians admire today is another Jesus. Today another Jesus and another way are preached, which most accept very easily. (There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, But the end thereof are the ways of death. Proverbs 16:25)

It is another Jesus who, they believe, is glad that people celebrate His birthday, a Jesus who, like them, would watch the news and soap operas, would waste time on the internet, on facebook, would go to the seaside to relax, would drive without caring about the traffic laws, would do undeclared work... would join the army, would take an oath, would get angry... (For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or ... another gospel, ... ye might well bear with him. 2 Corinthians 11:4)

The true Jesus is the One we find described by the Holy Scripture. He walked on the narrow way, the way on which He calls us to walk too. (If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Matthew 16:24)

In His relationship with the Father He denied Himself, He was humble, He became an obedient bondservant unto death, He was godly, He loved the heavenly Father with all His heart.

The true Jesus was longsuffering when He was reviled, He was full of kindness toward those who crucified Him, He was full of meekness, He loved His enemies. (who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. 1 Peter 2:23)

The true Jesus loved righteousness and hated iniquity. He did not joke, He did not laugh at the jokes of others, He did not use idle words, He did not quarrel with anyone.

He did not live in the flesh for a single moment. This Jesus calls us too to crucify the flesh and to live as He lived.

We Must Live as Jesus Lived!

Most of us were taught to look with admiration at everything the Lord Jesus did, at His way of being. We were deceived into believing that we cannot have His righteousness, His longsuffering, His meekness...

We are taught that the Lord Jesus lived at a divine standard, inaccessible to people, and that because of this, human weaknesses are permitted to us

earthly beings. We are deceived into believing that salvation consists only in the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice on the cross and that at the resurrection His righteousness will be credited to us.

If we want to find out how the Lord Jesus lived, only the things that are beyond the reach of the ordinary man are pointed out to us. We are shown that He walked on the water, fed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fishes, raised people from the dead, rebuked the wind... We could say that He did things that no ordinary man can do.

Satan deceives us, through the people enslaved to him, into believing that no one can live as the Lord Jesus lived and that this calling is not for us. But the word of Scripture tells us categorically that we must live as the Lord Jesus lived. It is a commandment that must be fulfilled by each of us. (He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 1 John 2:6)

The Lord does not call us to multiply loaves, nor to walk on water, nor to raise the dead, nor other miraculous things. It is not in these things that we have been called to resemble Him, but to live as He lived.

We must live in those things in which He lived and which are within the power of every man, things in which each of us can and must live as the Lord Jesus lived; both the newly born-again believer and the one mature in the faith.

There are things to which man gives no importance, but which the Lord Jesus lived out in His relationship with the heavenly Father. These things we must all practise too, from the least to the greatest, since they are strictly necessary for us to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Self-denial, humility, godliness, righteousness... in which He lived express the beauty of His character. For these things people despised Him and paid no attention to Him. (... light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light... John 3:19)

We are called to be full of admiration for His way of being, to be drawn by the beauty of the heart of the Lord Jesus. But we must also work to transform our heart after His heart: to deny ourselves, to be humble, godly, to become bondservants as He became, to be longsuffering when we are reviled, to be full of kindness toward those who persecute us, to be full of meekness...

If we find our delight in these things and put them into practice, through them we will grow step by step until we reach the perfection of our character.

In His relationship with the heavenly Father, "the true Jesus" denied Himself, He was humble, He became an obedient bondservant unto death, the fear of the Lord was His delight, He was godly and He loved the heavenly Father with all His heart.

There are multitudes of people who appreciate Him because He fed them, because He healed them, but as for the way He lived in His relationship with His

Father, they are not interested in knowing it, nor in living as He lived. Because Satan has deceived us into believing that it is impossible to live as He lived, these aspects of the Lord's life are not noticed by most of us.

But it is easy to see that we too are required to live in these things in which He lived. If we live as He lived, we will grow until we reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Bondservant = a person who blindly and servilely satisfies the will of another!

Self-denial

According to the DEX dictionary: Renouncing one's personal interests or ideas

In His relationship with the heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus emptied Himself. (who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. Philippians 2:6-8)

Self-denial means giving up your interests, giving up your own opinions, your own will, giving up answering back.

Although He was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus had no opinions of His own, He did not do what He wanted, but submitted His will to God entirely.

We find the definition of self-denial in the life the Lord Jesus lived in His relationship with the heavenly Father. If we do not have this picture of the self-denial the Lord Jesus practised, we will not know what self-denial truly means. (Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. John 5:19)

The Lord Jesus chose the 12 disciples after a night of prayer with the Father. But not one of them was chosen by Him; they were chosen by the heavenly Father. (... those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. John 17:12)

He did not work according to His own thoughts, but remained in obedience and did everything the heavenly Father told Him to do. When He washed the disciples' feet, when He was the servant of all, when He fed the multitudes, He was in full obedience to what the heavenly Father told Him to do.

He performed many healings, but He did not perform a single healing on His own initiative; all were done as the Father told Him to do. (I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. John 5:30)

This is the recipe of self-denial. If we admire Him for the way He lived, we will make it our own and practise it exactly as He practised it.

The Lord Jesus shows us how He lived on earth; He shows us this trait of His

heart, which is of perfect beauty. He draws us with this beautiful trait, so that we will desire with all our heart to have it too.

We have been called to live as He lived, to deny ourselves as He denied Himself. This is the true life to which we have been called, because the new life cannot begin without self-denial.

Self-denial is the first requirement of the Lord Jesus, which every man who wants to begin the new life must fulfil. (If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23)

It is easy to notice that self-denial is part of the plan of salvation, without which there is no new birth. This is how He lived: He denied Himself, He, our Bridegroom, and He asks us to do the same thing.

Examine yourself! Have you denied yourself, have you given up human values? Have you accepted the teachings of Christ entirely? Have all things become new? (Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17)

The devil came to deceive people with certain parts of the Holy Scripture, to show us that one cannot live as the Lord Jesus lived. But one can, and it is compulsory for salvation! (And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, **is not worthy of me.** Matthew 10:38)

He who becomes a bondservant of Christ has as his fruit sanctification, and as the end: eternal life.

This is how the Lord Jesus lived; this is how we too must live. We can easily see, looking around us, that self-denial is one of the most despised and disregarded things. Let us ask ourselves: Do we value self-denial, and do we desire to live in self-denial as the Lord Jesus lived?

Humility

According to the DEX dictionary: **Humility** = A humble, submissive, respectful attitude.

In His relationship with the heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus was lowly in heart. It is another character trait of the Lord Jesus, of a radiant beauty, with which He draws us to Himself. It is something that expresses the beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus, with which we must fall in love, so that we desire to be humble exactly as He was. (... learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Matthew 11:29)

We are called to live as He lived, to live humbly as the Lord Jesus lived, a life that is despised and disregarded by most Christians today.

The Lord Jesus is the model of humility for us. In His relationship with the heavenly Father, He was so lowly in heart that His judgment was taken away. (In his humiliation his judgment was taken away. Acts 8:33)

We too are called to this humility, in which our judgment is taken away. If we are honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that it is a difficult calling and one that is despised by most. (and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death. Philippians 2:8)

The attitude of lowliness and absolute submission is shown by the fact that He judged only as He heard from the Father, not seeking to do His own will but only the will of God; this is how the Lord Jesus lived. (I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. John 5:30)

He humbled Himself so much that He became obedient unto death. (who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. 1 Peter 2:23)

Let us ask ourselves: Do we love this Jesus who has such lowly conduct toward His Father? Do we love this Jesus who submitted to the Father in all things? Would we want to be the wife of such a Man, who has no opinions of His own but does only what His Father tells Him? Do we love this character trait with all our heart, so that we desire to be like Him too, to live as He lived? (Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God. 1 Peter 5:6)

Examine yourself! Do you live humbly in your relationship with God? Are you lowly and submissive in all things, as the Lord Jesus lived?

Godliness

According to the DEX: Godly = One who strictly respects...; respectful and admiring conduct toward someone.

Another character trait of the Lord Jesus, which is of perfect beauty, **is godliness.** The word of Scripture tells us that the Lord Jesus was heard by the heavenly Father because of His godliness. (Hebrews 5:7)

The Lord Jesus admired and loved the heavenly Father with all His heart and kept all His Word strictly; this is true godliness. To this we too are called: to have the godliness the Lord Jesus had, not merely a form of godliness. (... The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. John 5:19)

We must understand that only if we come to live in full obedience to the laws of the Kingdom, which are flawless/perfect, as the Lord Jesus lived, will the perfection of our character be reached.

The Lord Jesus came to earth to teach us godliness, which is admiration and strict obedience. (If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to **the doctrine which is according to godliness**; he is proud, knowing nothing. 1 Timothy 6:3-4)

We must learn to be godly as the Lord Jesus was, so that in the end we may be found obedient in all things, as the Lord Jesus obeyed the Father.

We can see an example of obedience in Abraham, when he was asked to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. He did not murmur, he did not negotiate, but simply did exactly as he was commanded. (And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God. Genesis 22:12)

All people will have to go through the examination of godliness, in order to be tested and found good for the Kingdom of God or unworthy of it. The status of a citizen of the Kingdom of God obliges everyone to godliness; it obliges us to admiration and to the strict keeping of His commandments. (For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, **having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.** 1 Timothy 4:8)

Only the one who reaches this godliness, of full, unshakeable obedience, the obedience that characterized the Lord Jesus and that is at the opposite pole from Adam's disobedience, will be found worthy to dwell forever in the Land above.

We cannot live our whole life in a form of godliness and believe that in the end, by appealing to mercy, we will still be received into God's paradise. (For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 2 Timothy 3:2-5;)

Examine yourself! Do you admire the godliness the Lord Jesus had so much that you desire to be godly as He was?

He Took the Form of a Bondservant

According to the DEX dictionary: slave, bondservant = A person deprived of all rights, wholly owned by a master... ; A person who blindly and servilely satisfies the will of another.

The Lord Jesus is the Son of God, but when He came down to earth, out of His great love for the heavenly Father, **He offered Himself as a bondservant** to God.

This is how the Lord Jesus lived His whole life on this earth, and He calls us to have in us this mind which was in Him. (Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. Philippians 2:5,7)

This was the Lord Jesus. Let us think of a bondservant, of a slave who belongs to his master. He has no right to decide what to do in his master's courtyard. He goes in to the master and is a slave who does only what the master says.

He is the Son of God, and we appreciate Him for that; but to appreciate someone who offers himself as a bondservant and who calls us to do the same humbling thing, not many accept this.

The Lord Jesus did nothing of Himself, absolutely nothing. This mind was in the Lord Jesus, and He asks us to have it too.

Although He was in the form of God, although He was the Son of God, He did not think it a thing to be grasped to be on a level with God or God's equal. He emptied Himself, took the form of a bondservant and became obedient unto death.

The Lord Jesus admired and loved the heavenly Father so much that He kept the Word of God as a bondservant. To this we too have been called: to keep the Word of Christ as a bondservant keeps his master's word.

It is one of the most despised things; it is the lowest position, to offer yourself as someone's bondservant, no longer to do whatever you want. It is disregarded, it is despised. But to this we are called. (But now being made free from sin, and become (offered as) servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Romans 6:22)

Once you have offered yourselves as bondservants to God... God does not enter into a relationship with us as partners. He does not want us merely to bring Him our sacrifices (gifts) and so to buy our place in His eternal Kingdom. No, He wants us to love Him so much that we offer ourselves as bondservants of our own free will. (Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; Mine ears hast thou opened. Psalm 40:6)

Bondservants of Christ: to this we have been called, to live as He lived. (He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 1 John 2:6) This is how the Lord's disciples lived; this is how we too must live, as bondservants of Christ. (Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1; Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:1)

Only if we find in Him the embodiment of perfect beauty, the pearl of great price, only so will we love Him with all our heart, with all our mind; only then is the desire set off in us to be like Him, to deny ourselves, **the desire to offer ourselves as bondservants** and to learn from Him alone.

Only love with all the heart and with all the mind is what moves me to offer myself as a bondservant of my own free will, forced by no one. Only this obedience of a bondservant to his master can result in the building of the Lord's image step by step in every detail.

Only when His statutes are my delight, only then will I deny myself and offer myself to Him as a bondservant of my own free will. (I will delight myself in thy statutes. Psalm 119:16; Yea, thy law is within my heart. Psalm 40:8)

Only when His words are a delight to us, only then do we build in obedience to all the details the Holy Spirit brings to us; only then will we be truly transformed. The Spirit changes us from beauty to beauty after the image of the Lord only if we obey Him fully, down to the smallest details. (Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: Quicken me in thy righteousness. Psalm 119:40)

You cannot become a bondservant of Christ until the old man dies, until you are determined to obey in all things. (It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with

him, we shall also live with him. 2 Timothy 2:11)

Our model, whom we must imitate in every respect, is the Lord Jesus. He admired and loved the Father so much that He willingly became a bondservant, obedient in everything. He became a bondservant of His own free will, because both the statutes and the commandments of the Father were His delight. (Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ... but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. Philippians 2:5,7)

Only those who are drawn by His traits and offer themselves willingly as bondservants have their fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. (... and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Romans 6:22)

It is essential to understand that all the commandments of the Lord by which we must live are a faithful image of His character, of His way of being; they show us how He lived, they show us His ways. All, absolutely all of His commandments in fact represent Him.

That is why we cannot neglect any commandment, because the traits of the Lord are found in His commandments. In each of His teachings a trait of the Lord is hidden. Just as all the traits of the one who is to be born are hidden in the human embryo, so the traits of the Lord Jesus are hidden in the seed of God. (The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11)

So if I desire with all my heart to have the traits of His character too, then His commandments will be a delight to me; then I will love them. I will joyfully obey all His commandments as a bondservant, and I will become like Him. (Therefore I love thy commandments Above gold; yea, above fine gold. Psalm 119:127; I opened my mouth, and panted: For I longed for thy commandments. Psalm 119:131)

Examine yourself! Have you offered yourself to live as a bondservant, obedient in all things to the Lord Jesus, as He did in His relationship with the heavenly Father? Are the Lord's commandments a delight to you?

Righteousness

DEX definition: Righteousness = Without sin, pure, immaculate, spotless, clean.

One of the most beautiful character traits of the Lord Jesus **is righteousness.** He loved righteousness and hated iniquity. (... he is righteous. 1 John 3:7) The Holy Scripture calls Him the King of righteousness.

If we are drawn by this character trait of the Lord Jesus, which is of perfect beauty, and love it with all our heart, we will hunger and thirst after His righteousness and we will desire to live righteously as He lived. (Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6; But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness. Matthew 6:33)

Those who are born again and are in the Kingdom of God love righteousness

and hate iniquity. So we have at hand a simple criterion by which we can easily examine ourselves to see whether we are born again. (If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. 1 John 2:29)

One of the most important things in the Kingdom of God is righteousness/holiness. (for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Romans 14:17; ... Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever. Psalm 93:5)

The citizens of the Kingdom of God do not cheat, do not use gifts/bribes, do not covet and do not take for themselves the things of another; if they are at school, they do not cheat by copying, they do not have stolen/pirated software on their computer, they do not take for themselves or use things from their workplace that do not belong to them. Example: They do not use the car or any of the company's things for personal purposes. (... neither shalt thou covet ... any thing that is thy neighbour's. Deuteronomy 5:21)

The word of Scripture warns us that whoever does not live in righteousness is not born of God. (In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God. 1 John 3:10)

If up to now we have not been subject to the authority ordained by God, if we do not love the commandment of the Lord Jesus which tells us to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, if we do not delight in it, if we are greedy and do not want to pay our taxes, if we do undeclared work, if we give bribes at the hospital and in other places, if the television/internet of the world is our food... then we are not drawn by this character trait of the Lord Jesus and we do not desire to live as He lived. (Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's. Matthew 22:21)

Examine yourself: Are you hungry and thirsty to be righteous in all things? Do you want to live in the righteousness in which the Lord Jesus lived?

As a conclusion, we can easily see that He has called us too to live in these things in which He lived, and we can live as He lived. If we live like this, the Holy Spirit will change us from beauty to beauty after the image of the Lord until we reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Only if we live as He lived can His character traits be imprinted on us, namely His righteousness, longsuffering, kindness, love, mercy...

The School of Christ

So that we have the opportunity to learn to live as the Lord Jesus lived and to grow up to the measure of the stature of His fulness, God provided in His plan the Church, which is **the Body of Christ.** (But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1 Corinthians 12:18)

The Holy Scripture describes the Church of Christ as a family, with infants, children and parents, where we live **in a close bond with one another** and grow so as to become like the Lord.

The one born of God is placed in the family and in the school of Christ, to grow as a disciple until he reaches the stature of a perfect man, **the measure of the stature of His fulness.** (And he gave some, ... 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)

In the Church we learn self-denial, humility, godliness; we learn to offer ourselves as bondservants of Christ; we learn to live in righteousness as He lived.

It is compulsory to live as He lived, because only so will His character traits be imprinted on us, namely longsuffering, kindness, meekness, love... and this can be done only in His school, which is the Church. (He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 1 John 2:6)

On a closer look, we can easily notice that all the things that concern the salvation of man, from the new birth until we reach the stature of a perfect man, are amazingly similar to the things we also meet in this short life on earth.

When we come into the world, we witness the birth of the child, which is very similar to the new birth into the Kingdom of God.

The natural infant cannot choose the family in which to grow up; those from whom he was born will be his family. To grow, the natural infant is fed with his mother's milk. All things are absolutely new to the newborn child. He absorbs everything he sees and hears from his parents.

So it is with the one born again: he has spiritual fathers who beget him through the Gospel. (For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 1 Corinthians 4:15-16)

The fathers of the one born again are those who feed him with spiritual milk like an infant. (And I, brethren, could not speak unto you ... even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat. 1 Corinthians 3:1)

He absorbs everything he sees and hears from his spiritual fathers. (as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children. 1 Thessalonians 2:11)

A little later the natural child is enrolled in school and then, after a time, graduates from it... In this world we cannot conceive that you could become a doctor without attending medical school and without teachers.

The same must happen with the spiritual child. You cannot reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ without being a disciple in His school. (... he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school ... Acts 19:9)

God gives us the new birth, gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us, places us in His school where we have spiritual fathers and teachers, so that they may raise us according to the standard of His Kingdom.

He has given us everything we need to be able to reach the stature for which we were created. (from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body. Ephesians 4:16)

This school of disciples has a single purpose: that the disciple should reach the stature of the Teacher. We must all follow this school, whose final purpose is to obtain the image of His Son in us. (The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. Luke 6:40)

The Son of God was sent by the heavenly Father to earth to establish the Church, which is the Body of Christ. He is the founder of the school of disciples, of the Church, which He cherishes. (... upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18; For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. Ephesians 5:29)

The Lord Jesus had disciples, then He sent them into all the world, so that they in turn would make other disciples and enrol in the school of Christ whoever wants to enter this school. (Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20)

We can take as an example the Lord's disciples, but above all the apostle Paul. He put his whole life at the service of the Church of Christ. He made disciples whom he taught in order to present them before God as disciples perfect in Christ. (... warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; **that we may present every man perfect** in Christ Jesus: **whereunto I also labour,** striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. Colossians 1:28-29)

Only in His school can the relationships between disciples be adjusted until maturity and full unity in all things are reached, a unity that will also be found in His eternal Kingdom. (that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. John 17:21)

God places the members in the Body of Christ in a way similar to how He placed them in the human body: the heart in its place, the pancreas in its place, the

nail in its place, each with its functions. (But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1 Corinthians 12:18)

God does not make any member grow outside the body, because separated from the body it can have neither life nor growth. Let us take as an example the kidneys, which cannot have life somewhere outside the body. They are in the body, closely bound to other members, from which they receive and to which they pass on.

So it is with the members of the body of Christ. No member can grow on its own, independently of the body. (Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility ... and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God)

Man must be put through various trials, so that at the end of the school he comes to acquire the character traits of the Lord Jesus, in order to be found worthy to dwell with God and with all those who have graduated from this school of disciples and have His traits imprinted on their character.

We will take longsuffering as an example. How can we come to have it imprinted on our character?

To begin with, we will learn and absorb the Lord's teaching about non-resistance; then, when trials come upon us, we put it into practice, walking in the steps of our spiritual fathers, who in turn walk in the steps of the Lord Jesus. (And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Matthew 5:40-41)

Each of us must go through this school of patience, which does its perfect work, because only so is the perfection of our character reached. (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, wanting nothing. James 1:2-4)

Those who are our fathers will watch over how we apply the Lord's teaching in everyday life. When our rights or what is ours are taken from us, we must follow their example and the Lord's, and live as He lived.

Although God's plan is so clear, yet for most of us the Church, which is the Body of Christ, remains a great mystery, the church being for many only the place where believers gather for worship. (This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:32)

From what we see today almost everywhere, we notice that Satan has succeeded in distorting the role of the family, the significance of the Body of Christ. Through the false teaching that "**salvation comes down only to the forgiveness of sins**" (a teaching that lies at the foundation of the religious organizations), he has

deceived man into thinking that there is no need for discipleship, nor for a school of discipleship.

We can easily notice that discipleship to Christ is non-existent in the religious organizations of today, and almost no one believes that he must live as a disciple in order to reach the stature of his Teacher.

On the foundation of this false teaching, Satan has succeeded in deceiving man into thinking that "the Church" comes down only to worship in buildings fitted out with preaching halls, through which man is given only a religious education.

First of all, he worked to replace the spiritual **fathers/shepherds**, who are charged with raising their children, with pastors/leaders in preaching, with ministers devoted only to worship programmes, who are charged only with institutionalized education and with keeping the flock in a scattered state, and by no means with raising the children. (... and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. John 10:12)

In this way the Church has become merely a centre of religious education, thus losing its calling, no longer being the place meant for the growth and perfecting of the saints, into which the heavenly powers look and marvel. (to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10-11)

If we look at the religious organizations of today, we easily see how well Satan has succeeded in deceiving mankind, all of them practising this institutionalized system of worship. From Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, to the neo-Protestant movements, all follow the same pattern of organization, with buildings constructed specially for worship and preaching.

So the one who wants to live in practice the life of discipleship, which presupposes an infant (child) - father relationship, will find himself in the ridiculous situation of not finding any spiritual father. This happens because today in most congregations spiritual fathers, such as Paul was for Timothy, Titus and Onesimus, are completely missing, having been replaced by pastor-preachers, committee members, youth leaders... (Thou therefore, my son, be strong ... 2 Timothy 2:1)

Spiritual fathers are those who are placed/made worthy by the Holy Spirit to ensure both the growth and the keeping of the children. (Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Acts 20:28)

So that they can do this, the children must obey them in all things. (Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. 1 Peter 5:5)

Submission is described to us by Scripture as full obedience, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left. (according to the sentence of the law which

they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. Deuteronomy 17:11)

Only so can our perfection be reached: only if we obey our leaders in all things. (Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account. Hebrews 13:17; And he gave some, ... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints. Ephesians 4:11, 12)

It is good to understand the difference between education and being raised under parental authority. Through preaching we receive only teaching, not also parental raising.

We can see how great the difference is when we look at an orphan child and at a child who has parents. Both the one and the other receive education. But with the child who has parents, besides education, the parents will be beside him to build his character, to encourage him in good things and to correct him where he goes wrong. With the orphan child, on the other hand, if he does wrong things, there will be no one beside him to correct him.

We must understand well that we will not be able to grow so as to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ if we do not have spiritual fathers. In Paul's epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, the Holy Scripture gives us the apostle Paul as an example of a spiritual father.

Even though Timothy and Titus had a high spiritual stature, the apostle Paul still counselled them and commanded them how to act in the spiritual life. (For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy... 1 Timothy 1:18)

We counsel the reader not to wish to be in an institutionalized congregation that practises only worship and preaching, to be solitary, like an orphan child, and so to avoid the Body of Christ, which is fitly joined together and compacted.

Let us flee from the congregation that does not practise care and submission, that has no spiritual fathers. There is the work of Satan, with which he has deceived the religious world; there is not the Body of Christ.

Let us desire to be in a body where the whole Word of Christ can be fulfilled, where each member gives its part so that we reach the stature for which we were created, so that the image of Christ is imprinted in us.

The Work of Thwarting God's Plan

Throughout history Satan has used all kinds of tricks to prevent man from understanding what purpose God has with him. Where he could not deceive man

with indulgences or memorial alms, he came with **faith in the sacrifice on the cross**; he emphasized its role so that salvation would come down to the forgiveness of sins.

On the basis of the same doubt that he instilled in Eve with the question "Yea, hath God said?", using the fact that there is no man without sin, he has worked and instilled doubt in the minds of people, convincing them that it is not possible to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

He instilled doubt in the hearts of most, deceiving them into thinking that the commandment of the Lord which says "**Be ye perfect**" cannot be fulfilled. (Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48)

He has worked in such a way that man would not understand God's purpose, so that he would not begin the life of a disciple in the school of Christ.

It would be good for each of us to ask: Does this doctrine of salvation, which comes down only to "the forgiveness of sins," have a biblical foundation?

To lead us astray, Satan has used only a part of the truth of Scripture, bringing man only a part of the Gospel, just as he did two thousand years ago when he tempted the Son of God in the wilderness. So he brings us a part of God's truth, which he gives us as the only truth, convincing us that man's salvation is reduced to the forgiveness of sins.

Satan has taken care to remove from God's plan the work of the growth and perfecting of the saints, deceiving man into thinking that the perfection of character is not necessary for salvation.

In this way he has convinced people that, even if they lead a holy and pure life, perfection is not possible (sin cannot be overcome). He has deceived them into thinking that even if they pursue sanctification, it will perhaps earn them a reward but will not qualify them for the Kingdom, because man cannot be saved except by grace, through mental faith, without works. (Ephesians 2:8)

Through this false teaching he has abolished discipleship and the importance of the school of Christ (of His teachings), deceiving man into thinking that these are not part of the plan of salvation. So he has brought man into the situation of no longer giving importance to the commandments of Christ and to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. (...through sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2)

So in these 2000 years he has fooled whole generations into believing that perfection is not possible, offering mankind the teaching that salvation consists in the forgiveness of sins.

We can see how well he has succeeded. Most of those who bear the name of Christians today stop at the salvation without great cost, at "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins."

This is visible when we look at those who believe they are "born again" and

who have a bankrupt life of faith. They acknowledge that they have no victory over sin, that they do not have the fruit of the Spirit, and yet they are convinced that they will have a part in salvation through the Lord's mercy, because they believed in the sacrifice on the cross.

The Great Religious Organizations – The Empire of Satan

On the foundation of this "false doctrine," which convinces man that salvation is limited only to the forgiveness of sins, Satan has worked in collaboration with the people enslaved to him to create a great religious empire.

He laid the foundations of the great religious organizations, which have passed on this teaching and have caught the ignorant multitudes in their trap.

He has made use of man's inclination to obtain what he wants without it costing him, knowing that man easily gives up the offer that costs him more. So he came with an offer that costs you little: you pay for indulgences, you give memorial alms, or you believe in the sacrifice on the cross (that the Lord Jesus paid for you), and you obtain the ticket to heaven.

So for most people Satan's offer is more attractive than God's offer, which has costs. The Lord's offer requires the crucifixion of the flesh and giving up the world. (because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life. Matthew 7:14)

In keeping with man's inclination, most are swayed by the cheap offer, by "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins," which allows walking on the broad way, and this is also confirmed by the Holy Scripture. (... for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Matthew 7:13)

Whoever is willing to look more closely will be able to observe that Satan, like a great merchant, has created a great religious empire with which to keep people in darkness, so that man would not know the truth about God's plan.

Thus he has placed in every country religious organizations (like supermarket chains) to offer cheap tickets to heaven, and he has succeeded in catching billions of people in this trap.

Man, because of ignorance, is thus caught in the net of these religious movements, and through belonging to one of them, most often not by a personal decision but because he was born so (Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Jehovah's Witness...), he remains under Satan's rule all his life.

If we look at all these great religious organizations of our day, which were created hundreds of years ago, we can easily see that this great project on which

Satan worked has indeed succeeded for him. None of them has in its doctrine this plan of God for perfection, and man, because he does not know the Scriptures, remains all his life on the broad way that leads to hell.

To see how great this work of deception by Satan is, we will look a little at this religious empire spread everywhere.

The first great worldwide organization initiated by Satan was Catholicism (today there are about 1.3 billion people), which indoctrinated multitudes of people, for whole generations, with the teaching that sin cannot be overcome; it deceived them into believing that God's purpose is only the forgiveness of sins and that you can obtain this forgiveness of sins by paying for indulgences.

By restricting access to the Holy Scripture, which could be read only in Latin, a language known only to the priests, Catholicism kept people in darkness for centuries on end.

We can also notice that Orthodoxy (there are about 280 million on the globe) indoctrinated for hundreds of years with the same teaching, which says that to have eternal life you need only the forgiveness of sins, and that this can be obtained after death through the prayers made for the dead, memorial alms...

In the Orthodox church too, access to the Holy Scripture was restricted for the common man, as it was available only in Slavonic, for hundreds of years on end.

For about fifteen centuries Satan succeeded in hiding the Scriptures from people's eyes, and he offered the ticket to God's Paradise without too great a cost, asking only for rituals, through the payment of indulgences, memorial alms...

The Incomplete Gospel - A Work of Deception!

Following the thread of history, we notice that with the appearance of printing, the Holy Scripture became available in the languages of many nations. Through searching it, people began to open their eyes, forcing Satan to find other solutions by which to deceive man.

Satan was forced to make use of the word of Scripture, which he arranged in such a way as to keep providing cheap tickets to heaven. He brought man an incomplete Gospel, with which he succeeded in deceiving, besides the Orthodox and the Catholics, other multitudes of people. So new teachings appeared, all based on the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.

We must note that Satan's main objective was the founding of as many religious movements as possible, with teachings as varied as possible, so as to provide tickets to heaven as cheap as possible and so to catch as many people as possible in his net.

The so-called reformation of Luther in the sixteenth century was a first great offer, by which he convinced the ignorant man that he can obtain salvation "only by believing

mentally in the Lord's sacrifice." So man no longer needs to pay for indulgences or memorial alms, because someone else has paid for him, and that one is the Lord Jesus.

Man was deceived into believing that salvation is reduced only to the forgiveness of sins, which is obtained free of charge by believing in the sacrifice on the cross, without paying for indulgences, without any need for the works of faith.

As for God's plan to bring us to the stature of the fulness of Christ, to perfection, it was kept hidden from people's eyes.

Then, as time went by, man came to know the Holy Scripture more and more and could no longer be deceived as easily, so Satan added other offers with "ever more diversified biblical teachings," on the foundation of which many other religious organizations were formed. These worldwide organizations, though they have "different teachings" from one another, have not changed "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins" with which he has deceived the world. We can easily notice this if we examine their confessions of faith.

The "more distinctive" teachings that distinguish one organization from another have no connection with God's plan, whose purpose is reaching the stature of the fulness of Christ.

God's plan, in which it is provided that we all reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, has remained well hidden, so that man cannot find the road to perfection. Whoever analyses carefully will easily be able to observe that these religious movements, spread all over the world, have an institutionalized system of organization whose only aim is worship, spiritual fathers being non-existent. (... yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel 1 Corinthians 4:15)

Satan has done everything possible and has succeeded in hiding God's true plan well. Because of these "so many confessional teachings" that are brought to us, most of us remain in major confusion concerning the life of discipleship that is provided for in the plan of salvation.

So Satan has reached his goal through the multitude of "religious supermarkets" spread all over the world, which are based only on religious education, thus keeping man far from the real life of discipleship.

Let us ask ourselves sincerely: Can this be God's plan? That we pay for indulgences, or bring memorial alms, or keep a day? Is this God's purpose? Does He want us to speak a few words in another tongue, to run after miracles, or to pronounce the name Jehovah and to study the last times?

Whoever has open eyes will see that these teachings in fact have the purpose of keeping us far from the true calling, that of living a life of discipleship in order to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

The Bankruptcy of the Incomplete Gospel

Today we can see multitudes of people who say that decades ago they were "born again," and to whom it never even occurs that they must reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This grave deception, which will cost them their life, happens because for them God's plan of salvation has been limited only to a form of godliness and to the forgiveness of sins.

They have let themselves be deceived by Satan into believing that the life of a "born-again" Christian is characterized by falling, repentance, confession, and falling again into the same sin or sins, and that so it will be until the moment of death. And this happens because we are taught that it is not possible for sin to be overcome and that in the end the righteousness of the Lord Jesus will be credited to us.

Many pray to God to overcome a certain sin or several sins (slander, anger, idle words...), and on the second or third day they find that they are overcome by them again. Because in their Christian life they have no victory over sin (anger, greed...), they cannot believe that it would be possible to live a life like that of the Lord Jesus, which would lead them to the perfection of their character.

So they have come to the conclusion that this is the true life of the "born-again" Christian, who in the end will get to heaven, not on the basis of what he lived on earth, but on the basis of the perfect life of the Saviour, which is credited to his account.

This is the status of the religious man who preached, taught, spoke in tongues, prophesied, did miracles, kept a day, but did not believe that God requires him to live a life of full obedience and of transformation after the image of the Lord.

But at the meeting with God he will have a terrible surprise. (Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:22-23)

The major bankruptcy can be seen in multitudes of Christians who believe they are "born again," but when they are on their deathbed, on the last stretch, they run to the only option offered by Satan, to the Lord's mercy for "the forgiveness of sins." We see many tormented by the thought that they have not lived in peace with their fellow men, with their brothers in the faith, and they seek them out to ask their forgiveness.

The bankruptcy of this incomplete Gospel, which is limited only to the forgiveness of sins, forces them to rummage through their minds to search for sins that have remained in their life, in order to ask the Lord's forgiveness for them, hoping in His grace and mercy. This happens because they neither believed nor worked to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

But we must remind them that "the doctrine of atonement" offered by Satan,

"of the salvation that consists only in the forgiveness of sins," carries with it the fear of punishment, because the Scriptures require us to be overcomers of sin. (Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 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 3:2)

Whoever has not worked to reach the measure of the stature of Christ will have this fear until he closes his eyes. Whoever accepts this lying offer cannot have full confidence in the day of judgment.

Only when we reach the measure of the stature of Christ will we have His love, which is perfect, and only this love drives out fear and will give us full confidence on that day. (Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: ... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:17-18)

If the religious organization or the congregation (group) in which we are does not put God's plan into practice, if it does not make disciples and place them in the school of Christ with the purpose of raising them to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Lord Jesus, but is limited only to obtaining salvation through faith in the sacrifice on the cross, this organization is not of God; it is not the Body of Christ.

We must flee from such an organization, which promotes Satan's project with which he has deceived the world. The Church is the Body of Christ and was designed by God not to call people to religious programmes, but for the growth and perfecting of the saints; this is its calling. (And he gave some, ... evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, ... till we all come ... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13)

The Lord Jesus warns us to search the Holy Scripture so as not to stray from God's truth concerning His plan, a plan that provides for the perfection of our character. (Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48)

So as not to let ourselves be deceived by Satan, we must understand that we are called not only to be forgiven of sins, but also to grow as disciples until we reach the perfection required by the status of a brother of the Lord Jesus.

Drawn More by the Beauty of Darkness

We have two offers available to us: the beauty of the character of Christ and of the Kingdom of God, which involves the crucifixion of the flesh, and the beauty of the kingdom of darkness, with the pleasures of sin for a season.

Most people, when they are shown how the true Jesus lived, or rather, when

they are shown the beauty of the traits of His heart, are not drawn by these "modest traits" and reject them as something to be despised; they are not interested in imprinting on their character this modest and humbling character, which goes unnoticed. (But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them... 1 Corinthians 2:14)

Most people remain only with a form of godliness, only with what the Lord did on the cross for them. The Lord Jesus calls all people to live as He lived, but people despise the traits of His heart and no one pays attention to them. It is easier to choose the pleasures of sin for a season and to believe what is preached to you today, that they are fully forgiven at the cross.

Let us not deceive ourselves, for great will be our disappointment in the day of judgment, the day of God's wrath. (For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Romans 1:18)

If, for example, we live in the sin of anger, if anger is still a way of life for us after decades of "repentance," let us understand that we have not been full of admiration for one of the most beautiful traits of His heart, namely the meekness and longsuffering of the Lord Jesus.

The new birth is the beginning of the work of perfection in patience. If we do not love this character trait of the Lord with all our heart, with all our strength, God's work of perfecting has not begun; we have not yet been received as disciples into the school where the patience that Christ had is learned.

All things must become new; the old things must disappear. (if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Likewise, if our life is still unchanged with regard to righteousness, if we do not admire and do not love this beautiful character trait of the Lord Jesus, if we are not hungry and thirsty to live in righteousness as He lived, God's work of perfecting has not begun.

The word of Scripture speaks to us very clearly: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." (1 John 3:9-10)

If we disregard the authorities that are of God, if we speak evil both of rulers and of others... if we live in the lusts of the flesh, it means that we are still in the old state, in which sin is a way of life, not yet being born of God. (Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: ... Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. Romans 13:1)

Personal Examination

It is good for each of us to examine ourselves in the light of the Word and to ask ourselves what new birth we have had. Are we drawn by the beauty of the traits of the Lord Jesus? Are we working consciously to be changed after the image of Christ? Are the fruits of the Spirit's work seen in our life?

Do we seek the Kingdom of righteousness, of peace and of love as a treasure? Do we find ourselves among those who have left the things of the world?

We ask you to be honest with yourself, to examine what situation you are in at this moment. Your eternity will depend on this!

Examine yourself: Are you in love with the beauty of the character of Christ? Do you desire to have it too? Have you made a real covenant of discipleship, of full obedience to Christ? Do you live in righteousness, and is your goal to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ? Are you subject to the authorities ordained by God? Do you avoid paying taxes, do you love the things of the world?

The Church is the Body of Christ; it is the school that has in it only disciples of Christ. It was designed by God for the growth and perfecting of the saints; this is its calling. (And he gave some, ... 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)

If you are in an organization that does not have as its aim real discipleship in order for us to become like Christ, look for a pure congregation, where the brothers care for one another and whose goal is the growth and perfecting of the saints, so that you can grow healthily toward perfection, to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ! (... follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22)

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If the first man was deceived by Satan and his sin passed upon all, this does not mean that a mistake slipped into God's plan. All things happened as was foreseen in this plan made in eternity, which God set in order with great care 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 measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (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 merely to a cheap salvation, which consists only in repentance (**putting off the old man**) and the forgiveness of sins, but provides for **the restoration of God's image** in us (**putting on the new man**) and our being brought to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)