Merely Forgiven of Our Sins – Is This God's Plan?

When each of us came into a church, we were handed a pair of glasses with a denominational, doctrinal filter for reading the Bible. We studied the Bible through 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, and that by faith in the sacrifice on the cross we obtain salvation, which consists in the forgiveness of sins. We were taught that **perfection of character** cannot be reached, and that no one can add anything to the work of salvation accomplished on the cross.

Many have been convinced that after the new birth, God is somewhere far away and does not involve Himself much in a person's life. Many understand the Holy Spirit's work in a person to be limited to a few outward things, such as speaking in tongues, a few miracles and prophecies, without the Holy Spirit being directly involved in transforming the person to perfect their character.

So we are left to assume that God will perfect us by some formula unknown to us, which He will apply after a person dies.

And that first part is roughly where most of us stay. We went to church, we had our own seat, we confessed our sins, we were baptised, 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 because of what we have done, but because we have obtained the forgiveness of sins by grace, through faith in His sacrifice, since there is no one without sin.

Scripture tells us, however, that to reach the heavenly Kingdom, to be saved, the standard of the Kingdom of God has very strict requirements: no one who is imperfect, who will not be like Him, can enter it. ("Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48; "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." 1 John 3:2)

We must have a credible answer to these requirements of God. So the question each of us must ask is this: What does God require of us? What is our part in sharing in salvation?

God's Purpose: Restoring His Image in Man

Concerning this requirement, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures reveals God's whole plan, whose goal is **perfection of character**. This means that the sinner must be born again and grow as a disciple in the school of Christ, until he comes to the measure of the stature of the

fulness of Christ.

Shortly after the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, alongside the teaching of the Lord and of the apostles **(the doctrine of the perfecting of man's character)**, Satan came with a false doctrine **(the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins)**, which offers a salvation without too great a cost, 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 come to the perfecting of our character, which requires crucifying the flesh (putting off the old man) and the transformation of the person (putting on the new man, created after the image of God).

To come to the stature of Christ, the Lord Jesus teaches that a person must trust fully in the Word of Christ, then must repent, deny himself, and enter into a covenant of discipleship whose goal is for the disciple to become like his Master. ("It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." Matthew 10:25)

Anyone, however simple, 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 entrance into the Kingdom of God. This is a sure thing we can rely on, and it will give us full confidence on the day of judgement. Today there are very few people who accept and put into practice this doctrine of the perfecting 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 closer inspection, we can easily see that most people choose to settle for a salvation that consists in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice on the cross.

Through his servants, Satan came with a cheap teaching which says that God reduces salvation to the forgiveness of sins alone, because man cannot overcome sin. Within this false doctrine there are several offers by which you can supposedly be saved.

There is a first teaching, typical of the early centuries but still very much with us today. It is a cheap offer that Satan brings to the ignorant person who knows neither the Scriptures nor God's requirements. This teaching assures people that salvation comes down to the forgiveness of sins alone and is obtained by paying for indulgences, memorial alms and rituals. (Here we find Catholicism and Orthodoxy.) The sinner who does not know the Word of God readily accepts this offer, because it lets him live his life in the flesh and assures him of a cheap formula for obtaining salvation.

Another teaching, also cheap, convinces people that they cannot overcome sin and that salvation is obtained "by faith alone", the price for the forgiveness of unconquered sins having been paid by the Lord Jesus. (Here we find the Protestant denominations; see the Reformation of Luther, Calvin…)

This offer from Satan convinces people that perfection of character is not possible, and it too gives them a cheap formula for obtaining salvation. You believe in the sacrifice on the cross and you obtain salvation, which again comes down to the forgiveness of sins. (The Lord Jesus has

paid.)

There is a third teaching, typical of recent centuries, which is closer to God's plan. It speaks to the person who is not content with these cheap offers and is looking for more.

This teaching says that salvation can be obtained through faith in the sacrifice on the cross and through repentance, followed by a form of godliness, a partial sanctification; but its goal is not self-denial, discipleship and coming to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Here we find the evangelical and Pentecostal movements, known in Romania as "neo-Protestant".)

In this doctrine we find the new birth and a life of sanctification, but without victory over sin; here too the general conviction is that 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, still leaving room for living in the flesh and never truly brought to completion, does not bring a person to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This is the case of the person who still holds on to things of the flesh: greed, anger, idle talk, working off the books, slander, beach holidays, wasting time on Facebook, YouTube…

It is quite clear that someone who embraces this teaching, in which unconquered sins remain, is forced to fall back on the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. This assumes that God will carry out the perfecting by some unknown formula, at the moment of death or at the resurrection.

We can see that, to deceive those who do not make salvation the goal of earnest searching, Satan has used not only alms, indulgences and the like, but also the sacrifice on the cross, offering people a salvation without too great a cost on their part.

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

This article is taken from the booklet Transformed into the Image of Christ – Unmodified Word – Spiritual Revival Resources, available free online in .pdf format.

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