Not Only Forgiven, but Transformed into the Image of Christ

Ask a Christian today how he will enter heaven, and you will almost always get the same answer: 'Not by what I do, but by the mercy of the Lord. There is no one without sin. We go wrong, we repent, and God forgives us.' Many live for decades in the same circle: falling, confessing, then falling again into the same sins: anger, idle words, speaking evil of others. At the end of their lives they cling to the only hope they have left: that God's mercy will forgive them at the last hour. As for likeness to Christ, it is postponed until after death or until the resurrection, when God will change us in a way no one can explain.

When the Truth Seems Like Heresy

The decline has become so great that the teaching that a person can and must grow, even in this life, to the stature of Christ is viewed with suspicion. Some consider it an exaggeration, others spiritual pride, and others call it outright heresy. And yet it is not a new idea, but the Lord's command: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48). To the rich young man who asked how to inherit eternal life, the Lord answered: “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matthew 19:21). Paul laboured with all his strength “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:” (Colossians 1:28), and the Church received ministers “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Not even the so often quoted text, 'we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him', allows us to wait with folded arms, because John immediately adds: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3). The future hope demands a work now.

God's Plan: the Image of His Son

When He created man, God said: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26). The angels were created as servants, but man was created to become a brother of the Son: God “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). This is the plan made in eternity.

The sacrifice on the cross has an irreplaceable place in this plan. Without it there is neither forgiveness nor redemption: in Christ “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:” (Colossians 1:14), and salvation is a gift, “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). But the cross is not the end of the road; it is its gateway. It cleanses us so that we can enter the school of Christ, where the Holy Spirit works to strip us of the old man and to clothe us “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:24). Forgiveness is the threshold, not the destination.

No one becomes an accomplished pianist by reading sheet music. He gets there by practising for hours on end and copying his teacher down to the smallest detail. In the same way, the traits of the Lord, longsuffering, meekness, love, are not obtained through a faith that is merely in the mind, but by learning from Him (Matthew 11:29) and overcoming trials, because “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:4).

A Plan Hidden for Two Millennia

Satan did not deny the cross; he cut the plan in two. He kept forgiveness and hid perfection, just as in the wilderness he brought the Lord only part of Scripture. He slipped in the same doubt as in Eden: “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). Is it really possible to overcome sin? Is the command 'Be ye perfect' meant for this life?

Over the centuries the offer has taken several forms. First, salvation was tied to rituals, payments and memorial offerings, and Scripture was read in languages the people did not understand. When the Bible reached people's hands, the offer changed: it is enough to believe that Someone else paid for you. Then came a partial sanctification, without self-denial and without discipleship. The forms differ, but the core has remained the same: salvation reduced to forgiveness, and God's plan hidden. It is the cheap offer of the broad way, on which the many walk, instead of the strait gate, which costs (Matthew 7:13-14).

The bankruptcy of this incomplete gospel is seen at the end of life. Many anxiously search out their remaining sins in order to ask forgiveness for them, because they never reached the assurance that perfect love gives. Scripture says, however, that only this love gives us 'boldness in the day of judgment', for “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. 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), and that without holiness “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:” (Hebrews 12:14).

An Examination in the Light of Scripture

Most of us received the Bible together with a pair of glasses: the filter of the teaching of the denomination we belong to. Through them we have read everything, without asking whether they might be hiding something from us. The Lord Jesus said to the most religious people of His time: “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29).

The Cuvânt Curat website exists for the person who wants to take off these glasses and read Scripture unaltered, just as it was given. And Scripture itself says what it was given for: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Whoever reads it without a filter will rediscover the plan that has been hidden for so many centuries and will experience the Lord's promise: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32).

We invite you to read the booklet 'Transformed into the Image of Christ'. In it you will learn what God's plan for man is, what place the sacrifice on the cross has in this plan, how the traits of the Lord Jesus are formed in us, and how this plan has been hidden throughout history.

If you have understood that salvation does not stop at forgiveness and you truly desire to be changed into the image of Christ, do not remain alone with this desire. Forgiveness without transformation, preached almost everywhere today, is not the Gospel the apostles received. Paul was already warning the Galatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:” (Galatians 1:6). In Alba Iulia we meet regularly, at meetings for the awakening of the heart, with those who want to return to the whole Gospel, whatever it may cost them. For details and for the date of the next meeting, call 0744 574 711 or write to contact@cuvantcurat.ro.

Source: *Not Only Forgiven, but Transformed into the Image of Christ* — Unmodified Word
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