

THE WEDDING GARMENT

„Friend”, he said, „**how did you get in here without a wedding-garment?**”
„**For many are called, but few are chosen.**” (Matthew 22:12,14)

„Friend”, he said, „**how did you get in here without a wedding-garment?**”

The man was speechless. And the king told his servants:

„Tie his hands and feet, and throw him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth...”

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

I advise you to **buy from Me** the fire-refined gold, so that you may become rich; **and the white garments. Wear them**, so that you may keep your shame and nakedness from showing. (Revelation 3:18)

Those who win shall wear the **white garments**. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life. (Revelation 3:5)

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Faith

For any human being, the most important thing in this life is to get to know the purpose for which we were created. It is extremely important to know why it is required to repent, deny ourselves, and believe the Word of Christ!

The Scripture shows that in His plan of restoring man, God included these three aspects, which are integral parts of the process of salvation.

As far as faith is concerned, we note with great sadness that it is nowadays misunderstood by more and more people.

One of the convictions we regularly hear is as follows: believe that Lord Jesus is your personal Savior, believe in His sacrifice/believe that He died for the forgiveness of your sins, that He has risen from death... and you are saved. The gospel of Christ is often reduced to the good news of the Lord's sacrifice and resurrection.

Let us ask ourselves: Is the sole belief in this good news enough?

Was Lord Jesus referring to this "gospel" when he commanded it to be preached to every human being? (*...preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Mark 16:15-16*)

Does faith in the Lord's sacrifice and resurrection save me, even if this faith does not work with my acts/deeds? (Brothers, what good does it do if someone claims to have faith, and yet he has no works? Shall this faith save him? James 2:14)

The Scripture tells us that there is such a thing as dead faith; this is the faith of the devils. (*You believe that God is one, and you are not mistaken, but so do the devils... and they are horrified! Similarly with faith: if it does not work, it is dead. James 2:17-19*)

If the Scripture tells us that even the devils have faith, then there must be a faith that they do not have; namely, a faith that would be pleasing to God.

On a day-to-day basis, there is a very close connection between what we hear, what we believe, and what we do. To show this link we will use an illustration:

- I read about natural disasters. I find out many details about storms and hurricanes which wreak havoc, devastate everything in their path, bring floods, and cause hundreds or thousands of casualties. If such a situation were to arise, in order to save myself, I would have to stop working and take refuge in a shelter. Such disasters usually do not occur in my area, but rather thousands of miles away from where I live.

Each one of us has the ability of believing or not believing information. God has placed in all of us the ability to believe, by which man may or may not believe the information he/she receives. At this passive stage, when you are strictly being informed, this type of faith would not require you to act.

- I am in town to solve an urgent problem that cannot suffer any further

delay. I am passing through an area where the representatives of the city authorities are warning the population about the approach of a large hurricane which is going to hit the city. They provide the necessary instructions to myself by reaching a protective shelter.

However, after checking the weather prognosis, I have no reason to believe in such a tragedy. Having heard this incredible news about the disaster that is yet to come, I find myself in the situation of having to decide. To not believe the warning given by the authorities, or to believe it and act.

If I will choose not to believe the news, the information won't help me. However, if I choose to believe it, this belief/faith will be forced to work; I will have to act and use the instructions of the authorities in order to save myself.

– In a hurricane scenario, my capacity to believe can be manifested through:

a. *Unfaithfulness/unbelief* – when I do not think that such a catastrophe can happen; I look forward to my initial task and do nothing to protect my life.

b. *Dead faith* – I believe the news and I am grateful to the person who informed me. However, I postpone it in order to solve the urgent problems I initially had, disregarding the message that was brought unto me. I disregard the rescue instructions and do not proceed to take refuge in a shelter just as it had been indicated. I decide that I can also take shelter somewhere else, in another protected place, but not in the protected shelter that was designated by the authorities.

c. *Authentic Faith* – when this information gets to me, I believe it to be true and it forces me to act. I leave everything that I initially had to do, I decide to act, I involve my will, and I do everything that is necessary in such a situation. I accept the authorities' rescue plan and put it into action.

My rescue will depend on being present in the designated shelter. But to get to the indicated safe place, I will have to do a couple of things. To trust the representatives and to believe that the warning is real. I must accept the rescue plan instructions as drawn up by the authorities and put them into practice.

The connection between what I hear, what I believe, and what I do is thus very clear. Even if I will be grateful and thank the person that notified me of my life being in danger, and yet decide to do nothing after hearing it, I will be lost. However, when the salvation of our souls is concerned, more and more people nowadays say that in order to be saved, believing in Christ's work on the cross and being thankful to Him is enough.

This booklet appears as a response to these growing inclinations toward a light gospel that does not force us to do anything.

In the following pages, we will highlight, by the Word of God, the inseparable connection between faith and obedience/the acts of faith, a part of responsibility that belongs to the one who enters into a covenant with God.

(the storm = God's wrath, shelter = Christ, authorities' instructions = Christ's teachings)

The New Covenant/Testament

Nowadays, in many evangelical congregations, it is stated that this faith in the sacrifice on the cross is our part in the covenant we make with the Lord. There is a general lack of interest in knowing the commandments of the New Covenant.

And as for the fulfillment of these commandments, they are not considered mandatory in order to be saved.

A long time ago, God took the Jews out of the harsh enslavement of Egypt and then entered into a covenant with them, by which He committed Himself to take the Jewish nation to the land of Canaan.

The Scripture tells us that through Moses, God gave the people a book of the covenant (*containing His conditions*), which the people were to accept and commit themselves to. (*He took the book and read it as the people listened: they said, "We will obey and do everything the Lord has said". Exodus 24:7*)

Today, God is concluding a new covenant with us, and for this He gave us the book of the New Covenant, which is the Gospel/Word of Christ. (*I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak all that I command him; it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. Deuteronomy 18:18-19*)

In the New Covenant (*Hebrews 8:13*), we have God's commitment that He will lead us into His Kingdom and give us eternal life, but not unconditionally. Our commitment to this covenant/contract must likewise consist of full obedience and fulfillment. In order to enter into this covenant with the Lord, I too will have to say: "*I will do and listen to all that the Lord has said*".

God promises to begin this work of salvation with us and to complete it. (*I am confident that He who has begun this good work in you will finish it. Philippians 1:6*)

He will do this only if man accepts his obligations; that is, to enter into obedience and keep the commandments that were given to him. (*Any man that keeps My Word shall never see death. John 8:51; He that hears my word, and believes in Him that sent me, has everlasting life. John 5:24*)

Thus, **God's part** in this covenant consists of:

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

– *the work of His Word „for you have been born again not of a seed which is perishable, but imperishable; through the living and everlasting Word of God. And this is the Word which was preached to you through the Gospel". (1 Peter 1:23-25); (The Word of God, which also performs its work... 1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

– *the work of the Holy Spirit (...by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5; by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2)*

Our part in the covenant concluded with God consists of:

– *believing in Him*, which means to put my faith in Him, in His work, and in His Word. (...*he that believes in Him shall not be ashamed. 1 Peter 2:6; I have given them the words which You have given me. They have received them. John 17:8; Jesus spoke so, and many believed in Him, and said unto the Jews which believed in Him: "If you continue in My Word, then you indeed are My disciples". John 8:30*)

– *our repentance*, which means, awareness of our sinful state, followed by regret and giving up the old things. (...*you have stripped the old man of his deeds. Colossians 3:9*)

– *self-denial*, which means to recognize Him as Master with full authority. I will have to renounce my own will to the will of Christ, to give up control over my life. (...*I do not My will, but the will of Him who sent Me. John 6:38; If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23*) I must accept that the teachings of Christ will guide me step by step, every single day. (...*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20*)

The Sacrifice on the Cross

We notice that there is much confusion nowadays about the role of Christ's sacrifice. Some believe that it is enough to simply believe in the sacrifice on the cross, where salvation is simply based on what Lord Jesus did on the cross as Savior.

Others rely on their own deeds, coming to disregard the work of the cross.

In the first case, man considers that for his salvation, he can do nothing but rely on the work of the cross, not giving any importance to the Word of Christ and the work of sanctification through the Spirit. In other words, the teachings of Lord Jesus and the work of the Spirit are not necessary for the salvation of the soul.

This way the Lord's teaching becomes a secondary, optional choice. In this scenario, discipline is also optional, and it is not part of the salvation process.

In the second case, the focus is on acts/deeds, neglecting the part of the cross and the work of the Spirit. (...*they sought to put forth a righteousness of their own and did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3*)

In order not to be in either of these extremes, it is very important to know the role of the sacrifice on the cross! We should know what place the cross has in the plan of salvation.

We believe that it is very clear to everyone that the sinful man could not, by his own good acts, pay the price of redemption. (*Ephesians 2:9*)

Someone without sin had to die for this, and that was Lord Jesus Christ. (...*holy, innocent, faultless, separated from sinners. Hebrews 7:26*)

The Scripture tells us that in order to be delivered from under the governance of the Devil, to be cleansed from sin, to reconcile with God, to be redeemed, and to be able to conclude the New Covenant and be relocated to His Kingdom, the Son

of God accepted to die on the cross. (...and to give His life as ransom for many. Matthew 20:28)

The work on the cross is God's gift to anyone entering into covenant with the Lord, who repents of his evil deeds, renounces his own will and trusts in Him. The sacrifice on the cross makes the forgiveness of sins and redemption possible. (He... moved us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love, in which we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13)

The cross makes it possible for us to be put in a new state, in which He can work with us through the Holy Spirit towards our restoration. (...the sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2; Transformed in the same image of Him through the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18) The cross makes the beginning of discipleship possible; it is the entrance into His school.

While being processed according to His image, the unintentionally committed sins are cleansed through Christ's blood. (But if we walk in the light... we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us... 1 John 1:7)

However, the cross will be of no use to us if we knowingly sin on this new path. (If we willfully sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood... and has insulted the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:26-29)

The New Birth – The Beginning of Discipleship

In the teaching of Lord Jesus, self-denial marks the beginning of discipleship and the rebirth. (If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23)

The new birth does not take place when we hear a message that arouses emotions, when there is no presence of the Word of Christ, repentance, self-denial, nor faith. Being born again is not an emotional, inexplicable experience of the soul.

Just as any biological birth (whether plant, animal, or human) is based on a seed, so is with this new birth; it cannot occur if it does not have the Teaching of Christ/the Seed of God as its basic element.

Three main elements participate in the birth of a plant: the seed, the soil and water. Like with the birth of a plant, the Scripture also mentions three elements that participate in the new birth.

The human heart resembles the earth. (But those on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8:15)

Christ's Word/His teachings, from which life sprouts, is the Seed. (The seed

is the Word of God. Luke 8:11; He willingly gave birth to us through the Word of truth. James 1:18)

The Holy Spirit is the third mandatory element. Just as the plant does not germinate from the seed if it does not have water, without the Holy Spirit, new life will not begin. (...by the renewal of the Spirit. Titus 3:5)

Lord Jesus tells us that only if we hate the old man, if we abandon the old things, only then will we be able to start a new life, and this will be a life as a disciple/slave of His. (*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate... even his very own life, he cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26*) The new birth does not occur without me giving up the old “man” and without submitting to Christ. (*You have stripped the old man of his deeds. Colossians 3:9*) The Lord enters into covenant with us only when we give up our own will and agree to submit to the Teachings of Christ. From this moment, life of discipleship begins. We become His disciples from the day we accept Him in all things as Teacher and Lord. To be a disciple of Christ means to be enrolled in His school, to learn from Him the new things from above, and to master them, as they are strictly necessary for our life in the Kingdom. We become His disciples from the first day of school, from the first day of the new life.

The Lord’s commandment to the apostles was, “Go and make disciples... and teach them to keep all that I have commanded you”. (*Matthew 28:19-20*) In other words, He sent them to go and make disciples, to enroll them in His school.

If we look at the work of the apostles, this is exactly what they did. (...they preached the gospel in this city and made many disciples. Acts 14:21)

They taught people to renounce their own will, to submit to Christ, and to keep what He commanded. Whoever did so became a disciple in the school of Christ. (*For the first time, the disciples were called Christians. Acts 11:26*)

In the school of Christ, we are God’s slaves, we are subject to Him in all things, so that we can reach our sanctification. (*Once you have been delivered from sin and made God’s slaves, you have your fruit in sanctification, and the end: eternal life. Romans 6:22*)

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

Attention! If any of these elements is missing, such as: the Word/seed, repentance, faith and obedience, one cannot speak of a new birth or the beginning of a life of discipleship, where Christ is Teacher and Lord.

The Word of Christ

The Scripture tells us that we are born of the living and working Word of Christ. *(For you were born again, not of a corruptible seed, but of an incorruptible seed, through the word of God: and this is the Word which was preached unto you in the gospel. 1 Peter 1:23, 25)*

If the Word of Christ is planted in our hearts, and we then proceed to make the decision of submitting and obeying Him in all things, the new life begins. *(...gently receive the Word planted in you, which can save your souls. James 1:21; Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my Word, and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. John 5:24)* “The word that was made flesh” (John 1:14) will come to dwell and work in our hearts. *(If you continue in My Word, you are indeed my disciples. John 8:31; The Word of God, which works in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

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

According to the Scripture, true faith cannot come unless we hear the Word of Christ. *(Faith comes by hearing; and hearing comes through the Word of Christ. Romans 10:17)*

We must know and understand what exactly we are called to, and to be fully aware of doing our calculations well regarding whether we want to go this way or not. *(Whoever does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33)*

If upon hearing the Word of Christ, we won't understand what we are called to, the evil one will come to take the Seed, and the birth can no longer occur. *(When a man hears the Word of the Kingdom, and does not understand it, then comes the devil, and snatches away that which was sown in his heart. Matthew 13:19)*

The Purpose of the Word

The book of the New Covenant/Testament does not have unnecessary teachings written solely for Jews, or for another period in human history. The New Covenant contains the commandments/teachings of Christ, which are strictly necessary for the formation of His image in us. *(The gospel of the glory of Christ, which is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Keep My words in your heart, keep My teachings, and you will live! Proverbs 4:4)*

Every teaching has its role, none can be set aside, all are equally important, only through them can we reach perfection. *(...be therefore perfect, just as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48)*

Some of the teachings are for patience, some for kindness, some for a pure heart, some for gentleness, and so on. Each contributes its part in the formation of

the image of Christ in us.

The goal of the Lord's words/teachings is to be like Him. (*The goal of the commandment is love, which comes from a pure heart, from a good mind, and from a genuine faith. 1 Timothy 1:5; And love consists of living according to His commandments. 2 John 1:6; God is love. 1 John 4:16*)

Here are a few of them: do not judge, do not condemn (*Matthew 7:1*); forgive the one who wrongs you (*Matthew 18:21*); do not be angry (*Matthew 5:22*); be gentle and humble (*Matthew 11:29*); be abundant in patience (*Matthew 24:13*); love your enemies (*Matthew 5:44*); do not resist the one who hurts you; if someone takes something from you by force, do not ask for it back; give to him who asks you (*Matthew 5:39-42*); do not separate what God has put together, do not remarry as long as your partner lives (*Mark 10:11*); if the eye causes you to sin, remove it (*Matthew 5:29*); do not store treasures on earth (*Matthew 6:19*); do not slander (*Matthew 18:10*); bless everyone (*Matthew 5:44*); do not use useless words (*Matthew 12:36*); when you hold a meal, call the poor... (*Luke 14:13*); "*For I was hungry, and you fed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to see me. I was a stranger, and you received me*". (*Matthew 25:35*); do good to those who hate you (*Matthew 5:44*).

We will exemplify three teachings

Paying taxes: "*Should we pay tribute to Caesar or not?*" Then He said to them, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's*". (*Luke 20:22, 25*) This commandment teaches us to be subject to the authorities; we should therefore not steal; it teaches us to pay our taxes when we are provided with a service, when we rent or lease an apartment, when we paint our house, for various repairs, or when we build something.

It teaches us not to partner with people who do not pay their taxes/who work illegally (*When you see a thief, you unite with him... Psalm 50:18*), to pay our taxes on all incomes. (*Love does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices over the truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6*)

Slandering - Blessing: "*Beware that you do not slander...*" (*Matthew 18:10*); "*Remind them... not to speak ill of anyone.*" (*Titus 3:2*) Therefore, we are forbidden from speaking ill/slandering anyone, whether he a relative or stranger. We can analyze ourselves: If we are dissatisfied with someone, and we complain about it to someone else, we are practicing ill speech. But the Lord's teaching does not end here.

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

"Bless, for this is what you have been called to, to inherit a blessing". (1 Peter 3:9)

Have we responded to the Lord's call of being among the few? (*For many are called, but few are chosen. Matthew 22:14*) Or are we bold and not afraid of slandering others? (*These men, however, disregard the authority and mock the rulers. Archangel Michael... did not dare to utter a judgment of reproach even against the devil. Jude 1: 8-9*)

This teaching has been given to us to form His character in us. If we speak ill of the brother, the neighbor, the government, the state... we will continue to have the character of the devil. We will then be among the ones who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. (*1 Corinthians 6:10*) If we are subject to the Lord's teachings, we will be blessing all people. **Attention:** On the day of judgment, humans *will be held accountable for every careless word, that they will have ever spoken. "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned". (Matthew 12:36-37)*

Non-resistance: *"If someone takes your coat by force, do not stop them from taking your shirt as well". (Luke 6:29); "And if any man will sue you for your coat, let him also have your cloak". (Matthew 5:40)*

We can check for ourselves: If we are among those who say that this teaching (*or perhaps other teachings as well*) is too much, and if we believe that we can oppose those who harm us, if we believe that we can sue for properties, land, etc. then we do not yet trust in His Word, nor are we subject to the Lord. The new life has not yet begun. (*What he is saying is too much: who can suffer it? From that moment, many of His disciples turned their back, and walked no more with Him. John 6:60, 66*) Let us be therefore very careful, for many have failed this test.

The Path of Faith – Acts of Faith

True faith involves unwavering trust in Christ and in His Word. (*He who trusts in Him will not be put to shame. 1 Peter 2:6*)

„Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ". (Romans 10:17) I will have to get to know Lord Jesus, *to hear, to understand and to put my trust in Him and implicitly in His Words. (And the seed that fell on good ground is the one who hears the Word and understands it. Matthew 13:23)*

We must understand that all the words/commandments of the book of the New Covenant are mandatory, not optional. *Faith is called to work, or in other words, it is called to keep the Word of Christ. (I have told them the Words that You have given me. They received them..., and they kept Your Word". John 17:6-8)*

„By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says: „I know Him" and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:3-4)

The Words of the Lord that we find in the Gospel are not a collection of texts

to make us more informed. They are teachings/commandments that will put our faith to work and to the test. Ex. *“But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, also turn the other to him.”* (Matthew 5:39)

The sacrifice on the cross will be of no use to us if we do not consider the content of the book of the New Covenant, which is in fact the Word of Christ. *(He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has someone who judges him; the Word I spoke is what will judge him on the last day. John 12:48)*

Our part: In this covenant between God and man, faith *needs to work together with the acts/deeds/works*. God is unable to work with dead faith. *(For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision help in anything; but faith which works. Galatians 5:6; We take every thought into captivity and submit it to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5)*

The work of salvation/perfection is of the Lord, yet He does not work alone, but together with the works of our faith, done in obedience to His commandments. *(You see that faith was working with his works. James 2:22)*

Lord Jesus tells us that if anyone hears His Words and keeps them, he has built his house on bedrock. And he who hears and does not keep them, builds his house on sand. *(Why do you say to me, “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I say? Luke 6:46)*

„Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My Word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life”. (John 5:24); „Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My Word he will never see death”. (John 8:51)

In Noah’s case, God’s part was to instruct him on what He was about to do with humanity, and then to provide Noah with detailed instructions on how and what to do in order to save himself and his family. *(This is how you shall build it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits long... Genesis 6:15).*

Noah’s part was not just believing in God for what was about to come. God did not just ask for a mental, passive faith, but to put his faith to work. *(So did Noah: he did according to all that God had commanded him. Genesis 6:22)* This faith of Noah worked all that was asked/commanded of him.

Our faith must also work like Noah’s faith. Lord Jesus warns us of the future wrath that will befall the whole world. For our salvation to be possible, He gives us precise instructions, which we must follow very carefully.

We must work for our salvation with holy fear, just like Noah on the ark, otherwise our faith will be of no use to us. *(Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? James 2:20)*

The acts of our faith, which result from keeping the Lord’s commandments

have the role of forming our character, so that by the end of our life on earth it will be like that of Lord Jesus. (*You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. James 2:22; Do your utmost to unite faith with works, and in your works, knowledge. 2 Peter 1:5*)

Faith is working with our works, and what we do in obedience to Him will shape the image of Christ in us. The acts of faith are not made to redeem ourselves, or to improve God, nor are they to obtain a reward, but are the acts of obedience to all that He says in order to be like Him.

The acts of faith work on our character, which must be built step by step. Just as a watch is built according to very precise instructions, where no wheel/mechanism can be missing, so must the image of Christ be built in us.

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

“But now that you have been saved from sin, and have become slaves of God, you have holiness, and in the end: eternal life”. (Romans 6:22); “We make every thought a slave of obedience to Christ”. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Through this working faith, we submit to the will of the One who is “our Lord” and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By doing everything He tells us, we gradually acquire the character of Lord Jesus, putting on a new garment on ourselves. (...*He was given to dress in a garment made of fine linen... for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:8*)

The cross will not be useful to us if on this new road, faith will not work with our acts. (...*What use is it, brothers, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? James 2:14*)

It is the same as in the old days when the Jews benefited of God’s strong hand to deliver them out of Egypt’s enslavement. However, this help did not guarantee that they will reach the promised land, Canaan.

God’s Word tells us that His strong hand ended up being of no use to most of them, because on the path to Canaan, He did not find faith in those who benefited from His grace. (*Indeed, we have had good news preached to us, just as they also had; but the Word they heard did not benefit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard it. Hebrews 4:2; They couldn’t enter because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:19*)

Without an unwavering trust in Him until the end of our journey, we will not be able to please Him in any way. (...*these are the one who, when they hear, they receive the Word with joy; but these also have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. Luke 8:13*)

„Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which you have also received, and in which also you stand, by which also you are saved; this as long you hold tight the Word which I preached to you, otherwise you believed

in vain". (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

Attention! If we praise God for what He did on the cross for us, believing that this is enough, and do not accept that we must deny ourselves and obey the commandments of Christ, we have a dead faith.

We show great unfaithfulness if we do not believe that keeping His commandments is our duty in this New Covenant. *(If every transgression and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape, if we neglect such great a salvation... Hebrews 2:2-3; Do your utmost to unite faith with acts, band the acts with... 2 Peter 1:5; Therefore, bear fruit worthy of your repentance. Matthew 3:8)*

God's Plan

Even before the foundation of the world, God planned to create and make man based on His own image. *"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"; God created man in His own image". (Genesis 1:26-27)* When man fell into sin, he lost the image of God. However, God foresaw this possibility in His eternal plan, where there was a program of restoring His image in us. *(Behold, I come! In the scroll of the book it is written of Me. Psalm 40:7)*

„He ordained them... to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers". (Romans 8:29)

„He chose us in Himself before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and faultless before Him". (Ephesians 1:4)

That is why His Son came into our world. He came to restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden; to teach us, and to help us rebuild the image of Him, so that we may eventually become like Him, in order that we may be found worthy of the everlasting Kingdom. *(Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Luke 13:24)*

Lord Jesus came on earth with the purpose of fulfilling God's plan, to save all people who want to be saved. That is why He works with us through His Word and the Holy Spirit in order to restore what has been lost. When we enter His school, He gives us all the assistance we need for the restoration process.

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

Those who understand this plan and accept it will participate and work with God to model their character according to His, to work towards a heavenly character. *(For we are His piece of work, created in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:10; ... we are God's fellow workers. 1 Corinthians 3:9)*

We have no other purpose on earth but to build the image of God in us, so that we may dwell in eternity with the saints, with those who are like the image of His Son, people of the house of God. *(Ephesians 2:19)*

God's plan is to live with those who are passionate of being like Him (*full of goodness...*), with those who put on the new man, made in His image. (*Put on the new man, made in the image of God. Ephesians 4:24*) But how does the Scripture describe the image of God?

The Wedding Garment

Man can be described from two perspectives: by his external appearance/face, or by his character/heart. In the first situation, it is the outer appearance that can be known through the physical eyes, while in the second situation it is the inner appearance/heart, which can be known through the eyes of the mind, through his way of being, through his character.

As for the description of God's image, His character cannot be known by His outer appearance, but only by His character/heart. (*1 Samuel 13:14*).

When Moses wanted to get to know Him, he did not ask to see His appearance, but to show Him His way of being. (*Now if I have gained your favor, show me please your ways; then will I know you... Exodus 33:13*)

Therefore, God revealed to Him His character traits. (*And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: "The Lord is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in patience and goodness". Exodus 34:6*); (*"The Lord is plenteous in patience". (Psalm 145:8)*)

The Word of the Scripture further describes Him thus: (*"He is the Rock; For all his ways are justice; He is a faithful and righteous God. He is just and pure". (Deuteronomy 32:4)*; (*"God is love". (1 John 4:16)*)

When God tells us that His image must be in us, He is telling us that His attributes/character must be imprinted in us.

He works to build His image in us and leads us by the Holy Spirit to put on His attributes. These character traits that we must put on are the wedding garment; and if we will not have the wedding garment by the end of our life on earth, we will be thrown into the outer darkness. (*"Friend," He said to him, "how did you get in here without a wedding garment?". Matthew 22:12*)

We must put off the old "man" together with his deeds and put on the new man, made in the image of God. (*Put on the new man, made in the image of God. Ephesians 4:24*)

The wedding garment's fabric is made of goodness, patience, kindness, love, mercy... (*Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. But beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:12, 14*)

This new garment is the garment of the heart that will make me like Lord Jesus.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

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

He who has begun this good work in us, through His Word and the Holy Spirit, will also bring it to an end. (*For we are His work. Ephesians 2:10*)

He gave His Son as a sacrifice so that we could be forgiven; He gave us the seed (*the Word of Christ*) from which life begins, and He also gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit for our renewal and growth. (*...by the renewal made by the Spirit...Titus 3:5; You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38*)

The Holy Spirit works towards our sanctification, becoming our instructor, guiding us on the way to the Kingdom. He works together with the help of the Lord's teachings to raise us and get the result God wants, namely His character in us. (*...by the sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2*)

The teachings of Lord Jesus are indispensable for imprinting His attributes in us, to shape us according to His image.

The Holy Spirit will take each teaching and work together with us towards our perfection (*When the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but will speak all that will be heard. John 16:13 He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. John 14:26*).

The Holy Spirit does not come into us to sit somewhere in the corner of our heart, ignored, without allowing Him to get involved.

He comes only as a leader, and only when we agree to submit to Him. That is why God tells us that we should aim to be fully led by His Spirit. (*Be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18*) He comes and starts working in our lives for us to bear the fruits of the Spirit. (*...walk in the Spirit, and do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Galatians 5:16*)

The Spirit works with us and is supportive in our weaknesses. He understands our weaknesses and helps by praying for us. (*And likewise, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses: for we do not even know what we should pray for: but the Spirit itself intermeditates for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26*)

But if we do not want to obey His leadership, He won't be able to help us in our weaknesses. Thus, we will stop the work of the Spirit. He will not force us to obey if we do not want to. (*Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19*)

Only if we allow ourselves to be exhorted by the Spirit of Christ and seek the things of the Spirit as a pearl of great value will He guide us towards obtaining

the character traits of God, towards obtaining the heavenly things. (...*walking in the things of the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:6; Those who live according to the promptings of the Spirit walk in the things of the Spirit. Romans 8:5*)

Where there is life from above, the first fruits of this new life will eventually appear as a result of the Spirit working with us. (...*we have the first fruits of the Spirit. Romans 8:23*) Therefore, we can easily see if the Spirit dwells in us.

The Scripture tells us that we receive the Spirit not to live for ourselves, but to become like the Lord; to have love and to work towards the spiritual benefit of the others. (*Love does not seek its own benefit. 1 Corinthians 13:4; And to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the benefit of others. 1 Corinthians 12:7*)

We must understand what the things from the Kingdom are. Moreover, we must receive them. Furthermore, we must give up on the old things and replace them with the newly found treasures, that is, the things/fruit of the Spirit: "*love, joy, peace, abounding patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*". (*Galatians 5:22*) To give up on the old things means to give up on self-love, or in other words, to give up on living for ourselves. (*Indeed, none of us lives for himself... Romans 14:7*)

By doing the above things, we will begin a new life, a life based on the things from the Kingdom. We will begin to work on the perfection of our character, on the wedding garment, guided by the Spirit of God. (*And clothe yourselves with the new man, made in the image of God, of righteousness and holiness, which the truth gives. Ephesians 4:24*)

If the new life from above begins, we will start having other concerns. (*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new...And these things are from God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18*)

We are in His workshop every single day, working with Him to transform ourselves to reach the character of His. By obeying the leadership of the Spirit, and through the Word of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit will start appearing in us.

Restraint of lusts/cravings:

A fruit of the Spirit is the restraint of lusts. If we obey the leadership of the Spirit, He will work with us to sanctify ourselves, to crucify our lusts, to restrain from anger and from evil thinking. (...*by the sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2*)

When we are tempted, the Spirit will remind us of the Lord's Words and urge us to act accordingly. He will guide and support us so that we may be able to combat evil thoughts and flee from the lust of the eyes, therefore sanctifying our souls. (*By obeying the truth, you have cleansed your souls through the Spirit. 1 Peter 1:22*)

Our part is to crucify the old man together with his passions, cravings, and

lusts (*the desires of the flesh, the lust of the eyes*), to work to build His image in us through the Holy Spirit, to help us put on the new man. (*If your right eye causes you to stumble, remove it, and cast it away from you. Matthew 5:29*)

To crucify the flesh, the Lord will provide us more help in addition to the Holy Spirit; this help is provided by the limbs of the body of Christ. (*1 Corinthians 12*) That is the reason why we cannot unite with just anybody. We must unite only with the members/limbs of the Body of Christ, which is the Church of God, where purity is practiced, and sin is not tolerated.

In the Body of Christ, we will be helped by the Holy Spirit and by the other members to grow and to crucify our old nature, to put off the old man. We must unite with those who do not love the world or the things of the world. Their restraint from the things of the world (*e.g., restraining from going by the sea, ill talking, watching TV, freely roaming the internet, working illegally, using bribery, etc.*) will help us to get rid of the old man. (*Flee from the passions of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22*)

We can ask ourselves: Have we begun seeking the things of the Spirit as a treasure? Are they a daily priority? Do we have the first fruit of the Spirit? Do we see a growth in restraining of lusts, the appearance of kindness and goodness in our lives?

He who has the Spirit also has His fruits. (*You will know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:16*) Do not be deceived into believing that you can have the Spirit if you do not have His fruits.

If we have given up a few sins (*drinking, smoking, partying*), and started reading the Bible, singing, praying, having Bible studies, but still living for ourselves, and not following the things of the Spirit, then we can be sure *that the new life has not yet begun*.

The Abounding Patience

This is one of “*God’s attributes*” which He wants to imprint in us. This *attribute* with which we are to be clothed is obtained by following the leadership of the Spirit, through obedience to the Word of Christ. (*He that has my commandments, and keeps them, is him that loves me. John 14:21*) Let us look at the work of each party involved:

God’s part: First, Lord Jesus is given to us as an example of abounding patience. “*I turned my back before them that beat me, and my cheeks before them that pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting*”. (*Isaiah 50:6*); “*In His humility, the judgment was taken*”. (*Acts 8:33*)

“*Christ suffered for you, and left you an example, so that you might follow in his*

footsteps. When he was mocked, he did not answer with mockery; and when he was tormented, he did not threaten, but submitted to the right Judge. (1 Peter 2:21)

Jesus gives us teachings that force our faith to work with the acts of faith. To dress ourselves with patience, he teaches us: *“Do not resist the one who hurts you, anyone that sues you for your coat, leave him your shirt too”*. (Matthew 5:39); *“If someone takes your coat by force, don’t stop them from taking your shirt”*. (Luke 6:29) If we accept and want to keep this teaching without taking anything out of it, then whenever an injustice, trouble, or persecution will arise, the Holy Spirit will urge us to be patient and will lead by telling us what to do and what to say. *(But when they will catch you into their hands... the Spirit of the Father... will speak in you. Matthew 10:19-20)*

God uses troubles, trials, sufferings, injustices to model us, because these types of tests are strictly necessary in reaching His *“abounding patience”*.

“We rejoice even in our troubles; for we know that trouble brings patience, patience brings victory over troubles, and this victory brings hope. And this hope does not deceive”. (Romans 5:3–5) *“Brothers, count it all joy when you go through difficult temptations, as you know that the testing of your faith works patience. But patience must do its work perfectly, that you may be perfect”*. (James 1:2–5)

When we are going to be persecuted, the Holy Spirit will not take away from us the blessing, the love for those who persecute us. He will urge us to pray for them, not keeping in mind their sin. To reach this *“abounding patience”*, the Lord shows us the limit to which we must endure. *(But he that endures to the very end, shall be saved. Matthew 24:13)*

Our part: In order to have this fruit, it will be possible only if we fully trust in Him and His Word regarding resistance, forgiveness, love, blessing... and if we do exactly as the Holy Spirit urges us to do.

We must trust the Lord’s instructions as given. We must look to His example and follow in His footsteps, doing as He did in His relationship with the Father and with the people. *(...for Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you may follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21)*

On a day-to-day basis, we encounter many challenges/injustices. Many of them can be avoided by using the available means at hand. The alternative is to accept and keep the teachings of the Lord, which will bear in us patience, kindness, blessing, peace, love for the enemies.

As an example, we may be going through a liver crisis *(or other medical urgency)*, which will force us to go the emergency room. People arriving after us start using bribes to get ahead of us in the queue. However, the Lord forbids us to use bribes, because bribes corrupt the heart. *(Ecclesiastes 7:7)*

All that we will have to do is endure this trial/injustice through hours of extra pain, up until the Lord will urge the doctor’s heart to take care of us as well.

When the driver behind us clashes into our vehicle, and then tells us that we are the guilty one, starts speaking ill of us, swings at us... we will have to not resist and endure this challenge. Also, if we end up hospitalized for a surgery, because of not using bribes, we will have to bear the respective outcome.

Maybe someone wants to sue us and take what is ours. If he takes something from us by force, let us not stop him from taking the other things from us as well. *(If someone takes your coat by force, do not stop him from taking your shirt either. Luke 6:29)*

Or maybe our *(unfaithful)* wife tells us an inappropriate word, or she takes away our legitimate right to be the man of the house. We should not stop her from taking away our other rights; we must endure until the end to win our souls.

When we are deprived of our legitimate rights, we are called by Lord Jesus not to oppose through words, or any other means *(eg. the justice system)* that we have at hand. The Lord calls us to be patient until the end. *(Through your patience, you will win your souls. Luke 21:19)*

We must keep the Lord's command just as it was given to us, practicing non-resistance in all things. *(Do not resist the one who is hurting you. Matthew 5:39)* This is how abounding patience, the fruit of the Spirit's work, will appear in us.

We must accept any harm that is done to us, even that which takes our lives, without resisting. We must follow in His footsteps. *(And to this you were called; ...and He left you an example, that you might follow in His footsteps. 1 Peter 2:21)*

The Lord will pass us through fire, which is the test of faith. If we remain faithful, the acts of our faith regarding the teaching of non-resistance will produce the expected fruit, namely abounding patience. *(Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial happening among you for your testing, as if a surprise were occurring to you; 1 Peter 4:12)*

This unwavering trust in His Word has as its end the faith and the salvation of the soul. *(You will gain the salvation of your souls as the end of your faith. 1 Peter 1:9)*

We must carry out, word by word, all that He has commanded, without resisting/opposing injustice, suffering, and persecution. When persecuted, we must bless, pray for our persecutors, and love them.

The work of perfection is His, but He does not work alone, but with the works of our faith. *(See that faith is working with his works, and through works the faith is made perfect. James 2:22)*

Thus, the "test of faith" works patience, which will perfectly do its work in us to become perfect. *(... as some who know that the test of your faith works patience. But patience must work perfectly, that you may be perfect. James 1:3-4)*

He works with us through various trials for our growth. These tests, which God promised are not above our power, will work the character of Christ in us. When trouble/injustice comes, and we fully trust in Him, having a strong

confidence that this trial is happening for our perfection, by doing what He says, we will be victorious.

We must trust in God that He does not allow temptations which are beyond our power to come upon us. (*There is no temptation for you, which is beyond the power of man. And God, who is faithful, will not allow you to be tempted beyond your powers. 1 Corinthians 10:13*)

There are countless opportunities to obtain this fruit. Once we are able to endure small things, the Lord will allow even heavier trials into our lives.

In this way, we will finally be clothed with abounding patience, which is the fruit of the Word and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

We should ask ourselves a couple of questions:

Do we have a permanent, daily concern for the things from above? Do we seek, starting dawn to sunset, to obtain this patience and kindness?

How about for doing good, peace, faithfulness, gentleness, love, restraint? Are we interested in dressing with the wedding garment?

Have we enrolled as disciples in the school of Christ? Do I follow the things of the Spirit as a daily priority? (*Then he said to all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23*)

or:

Do we have similar activities as before the conversion, such as watching TV, freely surfing the internet, going on seaside holidays, drinking, earning through undeclared work, using unlicensed software...? **This is the difference** between a child of God and a religious person.

The religious man did not enter this school of Christ, he is not interested in obtaining the image of Christ in him. He does sporadic acts of goodness, but without having given up his life, that is, his heart. He wants salvation without giving up the things of the world.

He does not consciously work to obtain the fruits of the Spirit, such as kindness. He does not walk after them as after a precious treasure. He has no interest in using the commandments provided by God to obtain these fruits. The religious man does not see that the Lord's commandments are for his perfection, with the purpose of obtaining the wedding garment.

Goodness, kindness, and love are three of the nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. As a result, a third of our daily concerns for the things of the Spirit should be for working on goodness, kindness, and love.

In order to have all the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, the Lord gives us teachings and then gives us opportunities to put them into practice. **Let us take as an example** the Lord's teaching regarding **goodness**: „*But I say unto you, love your*

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:44); "Do good and let them borrow from you, without hoping for anything in return". (Luke 6:35); "...when you give a meal, call the poor, the lame, the sick, the blind". (Luke 14:13)

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world". (James 1:27) "Let us not be weary in doing good; So, as long as we have the opportunity, to do good to all". (Galatians 6:9)

He will make sure we have work to do, whether it is in the church or outside, by helping orphans, widows, strangers, the poor. These are some of the good works that God has prepared for us to walk in. (Ephesians 2:10) The Lord shows us that in the end our garment must have goodness in its fabric, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

Those who did what He taught them are invited to the wedding of the Lamb. "Come in, you who are the blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me". (Matthew 25:34-35)

The religious man ends up having decades of "repentance" and yet did not work at all/almost at all towards obtaining this fruit. Or rather he was not preoccupied with following the urges of the Spirit. Doing good was not a priority for him in his daily life. See this fruit in Tabitha. (Acts 9:36)

The religious man does not see that these teachings, which he avoids, will keep him out of the Kingdom, where the weeping and gnashing of teeth is. (Depart from me, you cursed ones, for... I was naked, and you clothed me not: Matthew 25:41)

What now?

If we use our ability to believe, putting our trust in Christ, giving up control over our life, obeying His commandments and denying our own will by doing exactly what He tells us to do, without deviating left or right, then we will have the faith which is pleasant in the eyes of God. The faith which obeys everything that it is being told will save us.

If we will trust Him in proportion of 99% and not 100%, this 1% percentage of doubt/unbelief will not let Him finish what He started. (Take care, brothers, that there not be in any one of you with an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12)

God cannot work with us if our faith in Him is solely mental. Our part in this covenant is self-denial and obedience. Our faith in Him must be complete, otherwise His image cannot take shape in us.

The book of the New Covenant contains all the teachings of Christ, which are necessary for us to become like Him. (*The gospel of the glory of Christ, which is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4*) No teaching can be set aside. Each has its own purpose; none was given randomly. Some are for patience, some for kindness, some for a pure heart, some for gentleness, and so on.

Each teaching contributes to the formation of the image of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit will not leave us alone and will work with us as we grow.

If we only disregard just one teaching, such as resisting, the Spirit will not be able to work in us patience and kindness.

In this case, His image can no longer be complete in us; we would remain unfinished or incomplete. It is like a car that would lack the steering wheel, the brake, or something else, it would simply be malfunctioning.

As a result of this type of partial obedience, on the day of the Lamb's wedding, we will not be clothed in proper clothing. The patience and kindness will not be found in its fabric. (*He was given to wear fine linen... the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:8; „Friend”, he said, „how did you get in here without a **wedding garment?**” „For many are called, but few are chosen”. Matthew 22:12,14)*

May God help us understand what we are truly called to, so that we may reach the salvation of our souls. (*...you shall receive, as an end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9*)

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

The Scripture shows us that for the restoration of man, God included these three aspects in His plan, as they are integral parts of this process of salvation. As far as faith is concerned, we note with sadness that today it is misunderstood by more and more people.