

Forgiveness Received by Seeking Christ's Life

(The following lesson is taken from the book "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God"- Steve Bray)

Jesus said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit... Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." (Matt. 7:18, 20) Jesus is describing how the wholly sanctified children of God are able to receive a new nature that does not bear bad fruit. And praise be to God, our Lord is now able to purify our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit and then produce a Christ like nature from within our eternal souls while we walk in a mortal body. (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

With this hope held before us, new believers need to understand how they can be forgiven for their sins and reconciled to God through Christ's shed blood from the very beginning of their spiritual pilgrimage. This reconciliation with God is what enables the believer to be led by the Holy Spirit into the undivided kingdom of God. Every new believer will begin their spiritual pilgrimage by looking toward the promise of being enabled to participate with Christ in His divine nature "from a distance." Similarly, God's people in the Old Testament, those who were saved, died in the faith while waiting for the promise. (Heb. 11:13)

It is sad, but most Christians today are also dying while waiting to go to heaven to receive the promise. In this New Testament age of fulfillment, the long awaited Promise of the Father is available to the children of God before physical death. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave and has been glorified. Because He has a risen life, He is now able to communicate His kingdom-life into our eternal soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was His promise: "Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that...I am in you." (John 14:19-20) Jesus is promising something more than positional truth, He's talking about the reality of a new life! The Messiah is now able to establish the undivided kingdom of God in our heart.

However, well before we receive the Promise of the Father, God will provide credited righteousness to true believers. He will credit His called out people with Christ's righteousness while they are earnestly looking forward in faith for the Messiah to establish His undivided kingdom in their heart. We will find that the credit is received through a faith that is persuaded that God can do everything He has promised to do.

Belief in Jesus Christ is not a one time or static event. If our belief in Jesus Christ is not active right now, which implies a responsiveness to everything He teaches while we seek out His life of true righteousness and holiness through faith, then we really do not believe in the Lord who is portrayed in the Bible. The whole gospel message of salvation is based on the premise of a “believer” coming out from the ways of the fallen world in order to enter into the saving life of Jesus Christ.

“Remember Lot’s wife! {She was separated from the ways of the world, but then looked back.} Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life {to enter into the fullness of Christ’s life} will preserve it.” (Luke 17:32-33)

We receive the Lord’s credited righteousness while we are going forward in a responsive faith. *If our faith is real, we will be fully persuaded that God can do everything He has promised.* If you have doubts, then you should ask God to provide you with a greater faith and also find a pastor or teacher who is able to build you up in your faith so you may “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13)

Since Christ has promised to manifest His life and nature from within our inner being, *if we truly believe in Him*, we will seek out His life through a responsive faith. Anyone who has true faith in the King of kings and Lord of lords will choose to submit themselves to be led by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. They will understand how they must go forward in their faith in order to enter into a participation with Christ in His life and work, through His divine power.

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the {called-out} people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work...Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Heb. 4:9-11)

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh {“we have an obligation but it is not to the sinful nature” – NIV}, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die {have a dying spiritual life}; but if by the Spirit

you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live {in the kingdom-life}. (Rom. 8:12-13 NKJV)

...Those who are led by the Spirit of God {not by the “desires of the flesh and of the mind” – Eph. 2:3 NKJV} are sons of God. (Rom. 8:14)

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. (Matt. 24:42-43)

It is this responsive faith, which is willing to do the will of the Father in heaven that entitles the believer to credited righteousness. (Matt. 7:21) This is the essence of Biblical repentance. If you do not respond, you obviously do not fully believe in the God of the Bible. Abraham became the father of all those who live by faith in God because he believed what God said. Once he understood God’s ways, he RESPONDED accordingly. Belief is only real as we respond. Our words are meaningless without a corresponding response to God’s ways!

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father {of all those who live by faith – Rom. 4:11}...He did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being full persuaded that God had the power to do what He promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead {and now wants to raise our soul into a union with His life}. (Rom. 4:18, 20-24)

The Lord had said to Abram {Abraham}, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the {promised} land I will show you...So Abram left, as the Lord had told him... (Gen. 12:1, 4)

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Heb. 11:8)

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing {all heart idols must be given up}, and I will receive you {into the Sabbath-rest of divine life}. (2 Cor. 6:17)

Our old willful nature will not naturally leave the ways of the world. We will be required to use force against the flesh when God tells us to put off our old self and enter into this spiritual pilgrimage toward His promised land of Sabbath-rest. We often “see” giants in the Promised Land when we begin to learn how everyone who enters the land will live wholly under the control and power of the Holy Spirit. In our own human wisdom, we assume that it would not be possible to survive in this world without our own goals, self-will, and human efforts. Many people who are called out refuse to follow the way of Abraham. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit attempts to move them along, but they rebel because they cannot see where they are going. In truth, they do not like the idea of being born of the Spirit and walking wholly by faith, as Jesus did. People who refuse to come out from the ways of the world prefer to walk by the sight of human will.

Everyone who enters the promised Sabbath-rest of God is “born of the Spirit.” They rest from the old way of worldly wisdom and human will. Living wholly by faith, they are willing to be blown wherever and however the Spirit moves them. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8) The flesh-life sees this kind of life as impossible. The Spirit-controlled life looks like giants in the land to most called out Christians. There are not many Joshuas and Calebs who have a true and living faith in God. This is why so few people enter into the superabundant life within the land of inheritance. Only those who are willing to die to self are able to find the new life that is united with Christ’s life and nature. (Matt. 16:24-25)

If we truly want to enter the promised land of superabundant fruitfulness, we will be required to use force against our willful nature. But at the same time, we will find that victory will come through prayer and a dependent faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here again is a concise statement

describing this spiritual principle: “If by the Spirit you put to death the {self-originated} deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:13-14 NKJV) Those who are fully persuaded that God can do as He has promised will respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. They will walk in all of the light they have received from the Lord.

From Scripture we are able to learn how the earnest seekers of the Lord’s life and nature will be forgiven for their sins. *The key to receiving credited righteousness is in our willingness to respond to revealed light.*

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light {which implies giving up our own will in order to walk in the revealed will of the Father}, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

If my people, who are called by my name {Christian – a follower of Christ’s self-denying and self-sacrificing way of life}, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face {which refers to seeking out the Lord’s spiritual image through a responsive faith} and turn from their wicked {or willful} ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin...” (2 Chron. 7:14)

There is no difference between the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints when it comes to receiving credited righteousness. Abraham received this credit because he was fully persuaded in God’s ability to fulfill His promises. Christians today are justified on the same basis. All of God’s called out people had to respond to all of the light they had received from the Lord in their generation. The difference between the Old and the New Covenant is that we now have access to the long awaited Promise of the Father. Now, in this age of fulfillment, the Messiah is in a position to establish His undivided kingdom in our heart.

All these people {of the Old Testament} were still living by faith when they died. {Because they died waiting for the Messiah to manifest Himself, they had both His credited righteousness and the entitlement to enter into His life and nature when the promise became available.} They did not

receive the things promised {while they lived in this world}; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on Earth... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13, 16) {God has prepared a city for everyone who separates themselves from the ways of the world and waits on Christ's heavenly life to be revealed within their heart. The New Jerusalem can be established in our heart today and we can enjoy its firstfruits in this life!}

But you {in this age of fulfillment} have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God...to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to {the presence of} God...to the spirits of righteous men made perfect {in the faith}... (Heb. 12:22-23)

...For we are the temple of the living God...“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you...” Since we have these promises dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Cor. 6:16-17; 7:1)

Let us {therefore} fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith {who has come to establish His undivided kingdom in our heart}... (Heb. 12:2)

...Aim for perfection {which is a purified or undivided heart}, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Cor. 13:11)

May God himself, the God of peace {which we receive through reconciliation}, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thess. 5:23-24)

Christians in this age of fulfillment have been provided with access to a life that is far beyond the life that was available to the Old Testament saints. The Old Testament saints could never be set free from their sinful nature. And since the flesh-life has a natural conflict with the teachings of God and

His holy way of life, the true saints of old were always looking forward to the Messiah to come and set them free from their bondage to sin {the self-willed nature}. They knew from the promises found in God's word that the Messiah would have the power to give them an undivided heart. (Jer. 31:33; Ezk. 11:19)

They had been taught to expect a Savior, Someone who had the power to establish His undivided kingdom in their heart. He would purify them from all uncleanness. This was the long awaited Promise of the Father. And today, in this age of fulfillment, we are able to enter into the long awaited promise of the Father.

...This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake...that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations {with your sinful nature}...I will show the holiness of my great name...when I {supernaturally} show myself holy through you before their eyes...I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your {heart} idols...And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land {of Sabbath-rest}...I will save you from all your uncleanness... (Ezk. 36:22-23, 25, 27-29)

Even after the first disciples had left everything to follow Jesus, had received three years of intensive instruction from Christ Himself, had personally received the indwelling Spirit from the Lord on the day of His resurrection, and then had received forty more days of instruction from their risen Savior about His kingdom-life, they still had something else to do before they were able to enter into the New Testament age of fulfillment. They had to receive the long awaited Promise of the Father, by faith, through prayer. They had to wait to be clothed with power from on high. Only then could they truly know what it means to have the undivided kingdom of God established within the heart.

Christians cannot enter into God's undivided kingdom through any act of their own will. Everyone must wait for God to do His miraculous work of purifying their heart. The Lord comes to manifest the presence of His submissive nature from within the soul.

...Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple {in the body}...But who can endure {in the willful flesh-life} the day of his coming? Who can stand {in the pride of self-sufficiency} when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire {who burns up all the dross}...He will purify the Levites {who are already God's people} and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness... (Mal. 3:1-3)

There are many Christians today who are still like Christ's first disciples before they experienced their baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Before the fire came down from heaven to consume the carcass of their old flesh-life on "that day," which they had to first offer up on the altar of sacrifice, they were still plagued by a willful nature. This is what we see in most Christians today. They are still thinking about self and living to please their flesh-life, even while they are trying to serve the Lord. Some of these earnest Christians may have given up much to follow their dearly loved Lord, but their willful nature continues to raise its ugly head in all of their activities. And like Martha, they remain "worried and upset about many things" because they are still working by human effort. (Luke 10:38-42) As long as we are still working by human effort according to our own will, we cannot help but be worried about the success of our plans and become upset whenever someone or something interferes with our work.

These are clear signs of how someone still needs the baptism that immerses the believer into the life and nature of Jesus Christ. They need to be separated from the worldly way of self-will and human effort {self-sufficiency}. The "one thing needful" is to enter the Sabbath-rest of God where everyone rests from their own work and enters into a participation with Christ in His life and work. (Heb. 4:9-10) *When we have truly entered into this walk of faith where we are trusting in God to work out all things for our eternal good, we will never again have anything to be worried or upset about.*

Pentecost is the Feast of Harvest {Feast of Firstfruits – of the harvest}. It is the second great feast that was to be celebrated by God's called-out people. (Ex. 23:14-16) Pentecost followed the Feast of Unleavened Bread {the Passover Feast}. We celebrate Passover when our sins are forgiven and the Spirit quickens our spirit through spiritual regeneration. *But this is not the goal of our faith.* Our Creator had been planning for centuries to clothe those

first disciples with power from on high during the Feast of Firstfruits. This feast in the physical realm was a shadow or spiritual type for the new life that is now available in this age of fulfillment. He wanted everyone to recognize this second great feast as the time when He lifted the consecrated disciples of Jesus Christ into the firstfruits of His eternal life. *The eternal life is more than a duration of life. It refers to a quality of life that begins today and is to go on forever. We are to receive the firstfruits of this life today.* Of course, the third major feast is the Feast of Ingathering. It represents the time when we will receive the whole harvest of the eternal life in our glorified bodies.

There are many Christians who have experienced the miraculous “passover” in their heart. God has provided them with reconciliation. They sense peace with God within their soul. But there are very few Christians who have begun to participate with Christ in the firstfruits of His eternal life. They do not yet know the supernatural love found in God’s nature, the inexpressible joy of the Lord, and the peace that transcends all understanding.

We can distinguish these two different kinds of Christian experience by comparing them with Mary and Martha in our Lord’s lesson about the “one thing needful.” (Luke 10:38-42) The distinctive difference is related to the way that Martha remained “worried and upset about many things.” Even though she had entered into a life of service to her Lord, Jesus told her there was still something missing in her life. She lacked the “one thing needful.” She had not yet entered the Sabbath-rest of God, which was depicted by Mary resting at the Lord’s feet.

In God’s Sabbath-rest, the children of God rest from their own work and permit the Spirit of Christ to manifest the life and work of God through them. There is never anything to be worried and upset about because everything in God’s kingdom is in the hands of God.

There is a need to be “perfected in the faith” before someone will be able to truly live wholly under the control and power of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God. Resting from human effort is made natural to our new nature through the Pentecostal baptism that takes us into this Sabbath-rest of divine life. “For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work.” (Heb. 4:10) *We do not worry about what is taking place around us when we are permitting the Spirit of God to completely control our life.*

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...to be conformed to the likeness of his Son {who did nothing in His own will through human effort}... (Rom. 8:28-29)

When we are still working in our own strength, it is natural for us to be comparing our works with what others are doing. And because our work is coming from self with its source in self-sufficient pride, we end up judging others for not doing the same kind of things we have been doing for the Lord through our efforts. Of course, nothing but a carnal nature can flow out of this kind of service to the Lord. Like Martha, this kind of servant will remain “worried and upset about many things” as they are condemning others for what they are doing or not doing. The carnal nature will continue to flow out of the life of everyone who is working in their own strength.

The church needs people who are willing to go forward in their faith by entering into the Sabbath-rest of God. They need to know in their own personal experience what it is like to be at rest in the Lord and participating with Him in His Feast of Firstfruits. This is the “one thing needful.” In its firstfruits, the eternal life will look like our Lord’s life in a mortal body. Study carefully the apostle John’s testimony about the eternal life which our Lord was able to display in a mortal body. Like Him, when we are dead to self and the willful nature, the Holy Spirit is able to manifest the life and nature of Jesus Christ through our mortal body.

That which was from the beginning {which is the eternal life of the Son}, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life {who is Jesus Christ}. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us {in a mortal body}....This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did {in the firstfruits of the eternal life}. (1 John 1:1-2; 2:5-6)

For in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form,
and

you have been given {access to} fullness in Christ... (Col. 2:9-10)

We are expected to manifest the same form of eternal life that Jesus was enabled to manifest by the power of the Holy Spirit in a mortal body. Of course, when we are manifesting the light of His life, we will say with Paul, "It is I, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." It was during the long awaited Feast of Firstfruits that the first disciples were able to truly taste of the firstfruits of Christ's eternal life. Jesus came back to show Himself to them as an inner manifestation of His life and nature on the day of Pentecost. And now, in this age of fulfillment, all of Christ's disciples have access to the firstfruits of His eternal life.

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me...and I too will love him and show myself to him {as an inner manifestation of divine life}. (John 14:21)

As long as we are seeking out Christ's life of true righteousness and holiness through our faith, we will be in a reconciled or forgiven state. (2 Chron. 7:14) But reconciliation, with its credited righteousness and justification, is not the goal of our faith. *Every called-out child of God in this age of fulfillment should be waiting in all earnestness for the risen Lord to cut off their sinful nature and fill them with His divine life.*

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ. (Col. 2:11)

...And circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit...
(Rom. 2:29)

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place {in His divine presence}? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol {of the heart}...He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior {through an indwelling manifestation of divine life}. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who

seek your face {seek His spiritual image}, O God of Jacob. (Ps. 24:3-6)

If my people, who are called by my name {Christian – a follower of Christ’s submissive way of life}, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face {meaning the divine spiritual image} and turn from their wicked {or willful} ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land {which now refers to their eternal soul}. (2 Chron. 7:14)

We must expect to experience considerable soul suffering while God is bringing about the end of our self-life with its self-sufficient nature. This is why Christians must be built up in their faith and encouraged to persevere in the wilderness testing period. Everyone needs to be shown a clear view of the “pearl of great price,” (Matt. 13:46 KJV) because, as the Lord has stated, this kingdom-life will cost us everything from the self-life.

They preached the good news...Then they returned...strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. (Acts 14:21-22)

Again, the kingdom of God is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had {in the self-life} and bought it. (Matt. 13:45-46)

Jesus Christ is both the “author and perfecter of our faith.” And as long as we are seeking to be perfected in the faith, God will be leading us in a spiritual pilgrimage toward His Sabbath-rest. For those who will earnestly seek to enter into a participation with Christ in His submissive nature within His undivided kingdom, He will baptize them in due time with His Holy Spirit. Only then will they be enabled to rest from their own work and live wholly by faith in God’s power. This promise is set before every Christian who has ears to hear.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so

that you may be mature {"perfect" – KJV} in the faith} and complete, not lacking anything {"wanting nothing" – KJV}. (Jam. 1:2-4)

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness {willful rebellion against God's known will}. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him {from personal experience}...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed {which is Christ's submissive nature} remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:4-6, 8-9)

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star {Jesus Christ} rises in your hearts {in a manifestation of His divine nature}. (2 Pet. 1:19)