



Restoring my Soul

HE RESTORES MY SOUL, HE LEADS ME IN PATHS

PSA 23:3

JULY 2020

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A FIVE DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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July 2020

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The fruit of the tree of life

Jesus said, 'What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a *serpent*? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give *good things to those who ask Him!*' **Mat 7:9-11**. The gospel of sonship from the Father, which is declared by the Son, is not the 'stone' of a legal standard of righteousness that needs to be satisfied by His children. Neither is it the 'food' that belongs to the realm of the angels, which Adam and Eve ate when they believed the lie put forward by Satan, 'that serpent of old'. **Gen 3:4-5. Rev 20:2**. The gospel of sonship is the fruit of the tree of life that enables us to mature as sons of God in the fellowship of Christ. **Rev 2:7**. We eat this fruit when we partake of the body and blood of Jesus by receiving, believing and obeying the word of the cross as it is proclaimed by Christ's messengers.

The Ephesian presbyters needed to repent from the alternative gospels that they had ministered in the church, so that they could receive the word of truth as true food from the Father. Their 'first works' were to participate, by faith, in the fellowship of the word of present truth that was being ministered to them by Christ through the apostle John. In this fellowship, they could hear what Christ was saying to His church, receive illumination, turn and look into the face of Christ, and rightly divide the word of God by the capacity of the Spirit of God. **1Jn 1:1,3. Rev 2:7. 2Co 3:16-18. 2Co 4:6. 2Ti 2:15. 1Co 2:13**. Once re-established in this fellowship, and engaged in these works, they would then be able to proclaim the word of life that was *from the beginning*.

Alternative understandings

To be restored to first love, and established in the gospel of sonship, we must also recognise and turn from the religious philosophies and doctrinal traditions that we have believed and taught in the church as alternatives to the gospel of sonship. **Col 2:8**. Historically, these doctrines have been the attempts of various leaders and movements, claiming to be part of the church, to define the minimum conditions required for entry into heaven.

The early church fathers, who ministered in the second and third centuries, rejected the gospel of sonship that Paul and the other apostles had outlined in their writings. **1Ti 6:20-21. 2Ti 1:15**. These church 'fathers' were, in the main, scholars whose theologies were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. **Rom 1:21-22. 1Co 1:19-23**. According to their doctrinal assertions, a parent could secure their child's salvation and entry into heaven by presenting them to a priest for infant baptism. This practice of sprinkling infants with water for their salvation revealed that responsibility for the salvation of children had been formally removed from the family and had been assumed by the church.

Since the Reformation, many within the Evangelical movement have declared that entry into heaven is conditional upon Jesus becoming an individual's personal Saviour. The essential element of this doctrine is that Christ's death on the cross was a legal propitiation that saves a person from the wrath of God that is destroying them because of their sins. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for the sin of the whole of mankind, and this salvation is available to those who meet and receive Christ as their personal Saviour. Many Evangelicals now assert that all that is necessary for a person to enter heaven is to acknowledge this truth and to pray the sinner's prayer. They then receive forgiveness of sins and are saved from eternal damnation.

The reality of becoming an *actual* son of God through *new birth*, and its necessity for entering the kingdom of heaven, has been actively rejected by many adherents of this positional, legal gospel. **Joh 3:3-5**.

FURTHER STUDY GALATIANS 1

More recent church history

The restoration of the baptism of the Holy Spirit has been a recent phenomenon within all of the major Christian denominations. **Act 2:4**. Millions of Christians have received this baptism, which is evidenced by speaking in other tongues. This movement became known within the Protestant denominations as ‘the Charismatic Renewal’. Catholics who embraced a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit became known as Catholic Pentecostals.

Leaders among the denominations who supported this movement claimed that the Holy Spirit is the power and energy to make the gospel work in the lives of Christians. They believed that, through charismatic renewal, the denominations that comprised the church would be renewed. **Rom 15:13**. However, the reality has been that the historic doctrines that govern the denominations have choked this movement. Consequently, Christians have been bereft of pastoral direction and unable to live effective Christian lives as members of Christ’s body, the church. **1Co 13:1**.

Another doctrine that has gained popularity, particularly within the Pentecostal movement, is the teaching that a person’s salvation involves the necessity for Christians to be delivered from Satan and from the curse of sin, *through blessing*. **2Pe 2:18-19**. ‘The curse of sin’ includes sickness, death, suffering, poverty, demon possession, and any other contrary experience in life. The evidence that a person has found salvation is God’s ‘blessing’ in their life. Through His blessing, which is seen in prosperous, healthy living, they overcome suffering, poverty and the contrary circumstances of life. Exercising faith is seen as the means of accessing God’s capacity for deliverance from their distresses and difficulties. Faith is then regarded as being the key to obtaining blessing.

Many Christians came under condemnation as a result of this doctrine. **1Pe 4:12-13**. Their failure to believe was cited as the reason why this gospel did not work for them and why they were unable to find relief from their difficulties and distresses.

FURTHER STUDY ROMANS 7

The Latter Rain focus

Over the years, many believers have become disillusioned and left the Pentecostal movement. To address this crisis, a number of preachers proposed numerous and varied strategies that a person could utilise for the purpose of increasing their faith and achieving the outcome of a successful Christian life. With this goal in view, many books have been written and advanced within the broader church community.

The Latter Rain movement, from which we draw much of our heritage as a stream of churches, proclaimed the necessity for every believer to be born again, joined to the body of Christ through baptism into His name, and filled with the Holy Spirit. **Joh 3:3. Act 2:4,38.** All were called to serve as body members under the leadership of those who claimed to have ascension-gift grace. This was sometimes called 'the Christo-centric focus'. An individual's claim to sonship in this age was actively discouraged. Instead, it was taught that the manifestation of the sons of God belongs in the age to come. Sonship was, therefore, not considered to be a necessary emphasis for this present season.

The preoccupation with identifying successful ascension-gift ministries, measured by a person's capacities to build successful, well-run local churches, became a focus of the Latter Rain movement. Narcissism was a trait that motivated some leaders. Many leaders adopted a collegial approach to the presbytery, viewing it as a context for support, security and empowerment. **2Co 10:12. Rom 12:10. Php 2:3-5.** They used the presbytery as a resource for their ministry initiatives, and as validation for the exercise of control over their local congregations.

This approach to ministry was counterproductive to establishing healthy Christian relationships. For example, some leaders fell into corruption as they endeavoured to compensate for, and escape from, the pressures that were generated from this unusual way of relating. Others suffered emotional and nervous fatigue and, as a result, retired from the ministry.

Times of refreshing

Thankfully, in every generation since the Day of Pentecost, God, through Christ, has preached the gospel of sonship by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **1Pe 1:12.** By receiving, believing and participating in this message, men and women can enter heaven as sons of God. The Scriptures refer to this ministry as 'the day of visitation' and 'times of refreshing from the Lord'. **1Pe 2:11-12.** **Act 3:19.** For example, the apostle Peter declared, 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that *times of refreshing* may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, *who was preached to you before.*' **Act 3:19-20.**

The word of God resides in the hearts and mouths of His people. They are His witnesses on the earth. These are believers in every generation who have been persecuted for Christ's sake. Jesus and the apostle Peter identified these witnesses as 'the blessed of God'. **Mat 5:11-12.** **1Pe 4:14.** They are blessed because they are recipients of God's grace in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Because of this, they are able to minister the word of grace to others.

Light comes into the world through the testimonies of those who are ambassadors of Christ. **2Co 5:20.** Hearers who receive and walk in the light of their message receive salvation. However, many people remain under condemnation because they love the darkness of their own way and understanding, rather than the light that comes from God through the messengers He sends. **Joh 3:19.** Sadly, this can be true even in the church. This is evident among congregants who presume that God, through forgiveness, has justified their fleshly way of living. They do not see, nor accept, the need to be delivered from their other law through participation in the sufferings of Christ in order to be born of the Spirit and enter heaven.

Restoration of the gospel

In recent years, and with much grief, we have come to realise that our gospel was not the gospel of sonship. Although we recognised the need to be born again, we did not understand *how* a person is born again as a son of God. The truth eluded us because of our loyalty to other doctrines and ideologies that were not the gospel of sonship. However, as we have turned to the Lord and applied ourselves to understanding what the Spirit is saying to the churches, the Lord has been restoring the gospel of sonship to us.

We now understand that there are three necessary birthing actions that must take place in our life in order for us to be established in the kingdom of heaven. We must be *born from above* to see the kingdom of heaven. **Joh 3:3**. And we must be *born of water and the Spirit* to enter the kingdom of heaven. **Joh 3:5**.

We are born to see the kingdom when the seed of the word from the Father has germinated in our heart and we are illuminated to see our calling as a son of God in Christ Jesus. **1Co 1:26**. We are born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom when, through baptism and communion, we are joined to, and have an ongoing fellowship in, Christ's offering and sufferings as members of His body. Baptism and communion are *ongoing and concurrent* realities of our Christian pilgrimage. **Mar 10:38-39**.

We are born of water by being baptised into the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Rom 6:3-4. Col 2:11-12**. This is our ongoing personal fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ, through which we are being delivered from carnality and are growing up in our sonship in Christ. That is, through baptism into Christ, we are delivered from the old creation, which is passing away under the judgement of God, and are established as part of Christ, the corporate new creation. **2Co 5:17**.

Born of the Spirit

We are born of the Spirit through our ongoing participation in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood by receiving and believing His words which are Spirit and life. **Joh 6:63-64**. In so doing, we abide in Christ and He abides in us. **Joh 6:56**. The bread of communion, which Jesus identified as His body, is our commitment to fellowship as a member of Christ's body. **Luk 22:19. 1Co 10:16-17**. The cup of communion, which Jesus identified as the New Covenant in His blood, is our participation in the blood of Christ. **Luk 22:20. 1Co 10:16**.

The life that was in Christ's blood, and that brought Him back from the death of sin, overflows from Him and is given to be our life through fellowship in His sufferings as a member of His body. **Heb 13:20-21. Php 3:11**. This life is the *exanastasis* dimension of Yahweh's life, as Eternal Spirit, which becomes our life. As His life overflows to us, it is able to overflow from us to others. We are able to participate in the giving and receiving of this grace of life according to our sanctification as a member of the body of Christ.

Our major focus as presbyteries, and as a church movement, has been to understand the pathway of salvation that Christ pioneered for us through His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. **Heb 5:8-9**. As those who are being restored to the pathway of sonship in Christ, we can testify that 'we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul'. **Heb 10:39**. However, we note that if we do draw back from the gospel of sonship, Christ's soul will have no pleasure in us. **Heb 10:38**. That is, we will fail to obtain eternal life as a son of God.

New birth through seed-life

A person is unable to enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again as a son of God. **Joh 3:5**. During His ministry, Jesus used parables to teach the mystery of the kingdom of God. **Mar 4:11**. His parables revealed the life and culture of sonship. Importantly, Jesus said that a person would be unable to understand His parables, or their implications for sonship life, unless they first understood the parable of the sower and the seed. **Mar 4:13**.

In the parable of the sower, the first point to note is that the seed 'is the word of God'. **Luk 8:11**. From the Gospel of John, we learn that Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, *is the Word*. **Joh 1:1-2. Joh 1:14**. When Yahweh Son was begotten as the Son and Seed of the Father, before the creation of the heavens and the earth, the names of every son and daughter of God were written in Him.

The gospel of God is the word that is preached by messengers of the Father who are sent by Christ. **1Th 2:9. Joh 13:20. Rom 10:14-15**. We note, therefore, that the sower of the seed is the Father. When a person hears this word, Christ, the Seed, enters their heart. The spirit, or heart, of a person is the ground into which the seed is sown. Their spirit is their identity. The seed must germinate within their spirit, causing them to be born of God, and giving them their name as a son of God.

This process of germination only begins when a hearer's heart is broken, and they become poor in spirit under the influence of grace and supplication. **Mat 5:3**. In repentance, and by the faith that they receive as they hear God's word, they cry out to the Father to receive the sonship that the gospel is proclaiming to them. **Rom 10:17. 2Co 4:13**. Paul described this cry as 'the spirit of adoption'. **Rom 8:15**.

Wayside ground

A person who does not understand the gospel of sonship has not been illuminated to see the kingdom of God. **Mat 13:19**. They are not receiving the washing of regeneration and renewing of their spirit by the Holy Spirit. **Tit 3:4-5**. Without regeneration and renewing, the eye of their body, which is their spirit, is unable to be illuminated by the light of the gospel. **Luk 11:34-36**. Because of this, the seed of the word is unable to germinate in their heart.

There is prevenient grace inherent in the word of God which enables it to germinate within the heart of a hearer so that they can see the kingdom of God. For this reason, a person's inability to understand the word reveals that they have *refused* 'Him who speaks'. **Heb 12:25**. They have rejected the word that enables them to see their calling as a son of God. **1Co 1:26**. Instead, they remain loyal to some alternative philosophy of religion that is sourced from the spirit of the world.

The 'wayside' person who attends a church allows Satan to take Christ's word from them by giving their loyalty to the religious agendas and fleshly, theological positions of leaders who deny that it is necessary for a person to receive God's word so that they can be born of God at a personal level. Jesus identified these leaders as being part of 'the synagogue of Satan'. **Rev 2:9**. **Rev 3:9**.

The 'wayside' person gives their loyalty to church leaders and their teaching because they remain in bondage to fear. Understanding that is given by the Holy Spirit when the gospel is preached, eludes them, because they have rejected the word of the cross that calls them to be born as a son of God and to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering. In this way, the ministers of Satan, typified by Christ as 'birds of the air', take the word of life from a person's heart. **Mar 4:4,15**. **2Co 11:20**.

FURTHER STUDY JOHN 8

Stony ground

On stony ground, the Seed of Christ is received into the heart of a hearer and they are born again as a son of God. Jesus said, 'He who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.' **Mat 13:20-21**. A person who hears the word and receives it with joy has been born again as a son of God. The seed of the word has 'germinated' in their heart.

The first action of God the Father is to name us as His son or daughter when we receive Christ into our heart. The name of a son of God is the complete word that defines their identity and works, for eternity. When a person receives their newborn name in the seed of the word that is proclaimed to them, their human identity is redefined by this new name. This is the point of regeneration where their spirit is reborn. This person has received the divine nature as their life. They are now a son of God.

They must now join the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through baptism or *they will 'die' again*. **Rom 6:3-4**. The life of Christ is only *multiplied* to become their life as they maintain a committed participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. On this point, Jesus was emphatic, saying, 'He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and *he who has lost his life for My sake will find it*.' **Mat 10:38-39**. Although Christ has come *into us*, we must come *into Christ* in order to live as a new creation son of God. **2Co 5:17**.

Baptism into Christ's death

Christ was 'made sin' in the garden of Gethsemane when He drank the cup of cursing that the Father gave Him to drink on our behalf. **2Co 5:21**. He died to God, and then came back from death as He was born from among the dead by the blood that fell from His body as an atonement that gave Him life. This was when Christ, the Seed, fell into the ground of humanity and died, and began to come back from the dead as a sheaf of firstfruits. **Joh 12:24. 1Co 15:20-23**.

It is not only the 'old man', now dead in its carnality and sin, that is crucified with Christ. Christ left Gethsemane with His disciples as the beginning of the new creation. In six more wounding, dying steps, we, as part of the new creation, came to birth with Him. As a son of God with new creation life, we die with Christ in the fellowship of His baptism. We come to maturity as a son of God in the fellowship of Christ's death, as sin and the other law are removed from our life, and His life is multiplied and given to us to be our life. **Gal 2:20**.

Addressing the implications of baptism, Paul said, 'For you died [when you were baptised into Christ], and your life [zoe] is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life [zoe] appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.' **Col 3:3-4**. When our sonship is hidden with Christ in God, our life is no longer ours to express as we see fit. The life which we now live in the flesh is Christ's life. **Gal 2:20**. This is an important understanding because, unless we live and die with Christ's life, as a member of His body, we are unable to receive the full glory of our sonship that is necessary for our life in the new heavens and earth.

Joined to Christ's offering

Each day, as we journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, sin is being put to death in us, and the other law is being circumcised from our heart. Furthermore, Christ's *exanastasis* life is bringing us back from the death of sin. It is being multiplied to us to become our life. In this regard, we are growing up in *exanastasis* by the multiplication of the life of the Son of God.

Importantly, by the *exanastasis* life that we receive in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, our identity as a son of God continues to be regenerated and renewed. Our identity is being regenerated from the corruptible to the incorruptible, in Christ. By this means, the material – our physical person – is being made spiritual. We are growing up in Christ, who is the immortal Head of His body, the church. We are only able to grow in Christ if we are a member of His body. **Eph 4:15.**

The person whose heart is likened to stony ground does not accept that their sonship depends upon maintaining their fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. **1Pe 4:12-13.** In fact, suffering and tribulation cause them offence. They view themselves as being the victim of their circumstances, rather than as being a participant in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Because they are *not joined to this process*, their identity is not being regenerated, and they are not being established in Christ. **1Pe 2:6-7.** His life is not becoming their life. For this reason, they become weak in faith, spiritually sick, and may die before they come to maturity as a son of God. **1Co 11:30.**

Because of unbelief, these people have drawn back from the Lord and from the fellowship of His offering and sufferings to which He has invited them for their salvation. Unless they find repentance and faith, His soul will have no pleasure in them, and they will fail to enter the kingdom of heaven. **Heb 10:38-39.**

Thorny ground

Jesus explained that a person whose heart is like thorny ground has esteemed the riches of this world as being greater treasure than the reward of eternal life that is found in the fellowship of Christ's reproach. **1Ti 6:10**. He said, 'Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.' **Mat 13:22**.

There are several indicators that thorns and thistles have taken hold in our heart and have begun to stifle the expression of our sonship life, which is love. The most obvious signs are our 'prickly' responses toward others when we are not received by them in the way that we expected. Thorny ground is also commonly indicated by the 'pointed' judgements that we make about others, including the messengers of Christ and their message. These expectations and judgements reveal that we are living according to a self-defined projection of ourselves. **2Ti 4:10**. This is who we think we are, and how we would like to be known and accepted by others, particularly in the body of Christ. **Rom 12:3**.

The life that we desire to have in the flesh, and presume to obtain through the accomplishment of our self-defined works, is 'the riches of the world'. This is because it is the riches that were promised to mankind by Satan, who is the ruler of this world. **Joh 12:31**. He said that we could have life in ourselves and could define our own destiny by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Gen 3:4-5**. To live this way is to be *deceived*. This is why Jesus described the thorns as 'the cares of this world and the *deceitfulness* of riches'. **Mat 13:22**.

Living in deception

The apostle John said, 'If we say that we have no sin, *we deceive ourselves*, and the truth is not in us.' **1Jn 1:8**. Of course, there would be very few people, even in the world, who would say that they have no sin. So, what did the apostle mean? John was pointing out that we are deceived when we believe that our perceptions and activities, which are motivated by the desires of our heart, are spiritual, true, and are leading to life. **1Co 3:18**. However, our anxieties, our judgements, our critical appraisals of the word and its relevance to us, as well as specific breaches of relationship in the body of Christ, reveal our true condition. **Jas 1:26**. The absence of life and peace, and of easy fellowship with those who proclaim the word to us, reveals that the word of our sonship is being choked.

Through his letter to the Galatians, Paul highlighted that it is possible to begin 'in the Spirit' and then to revert to living according to the flesh, without even being aware that this transition has happened. He strongly admonished his readers, saying, 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ... are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?' **Gal 3:1,3**. The only way to be recovered from this darkened, or deceived, condition is to receive the light that shines through the ministry of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.

We can only know our sanctification, which is the truth concerning our name and works as a son of God, by receiving and walking in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. This light is the word of our sonship from the Father. It is shone into our hearts from the face of Christ, by the Spirit, through the ministry of the members of the body of Christ when we gather for communion. **2Co 4:6**.

Worship in Spirit and truth

When we are illuminated by the light of the knowledge of God from the face of Christ, we can worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth as part of the company of true worshippers. **2Co 4:6. Joh 4:23.** Spiritual worship is our participation in the fellowship of offering as the particular member of the body of Christ whom the Father has named us to be. **Rom 12:1-2.** Jesus taught on the nature of true worship during His discussion with the Samaritan woman concerning *where and how* God's people should gather to worship the Lord. He said, 'God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.' **Joh 4:24.**

This point focuses our attention on the importance of *how* we come together to eat and drink the elements of communion. The communion meal is the Lord's provision for our participation in the New Covenant *as members of His body.* As Jesus said, 'He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.' **Joh 6:56.** We eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood by receiving and believing His word which is Spirit and life to us. His word is proclaiming the truth of who we are and is joining us, as members of His body, to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, our projections, which are motivated by shame, can be put off, and we can minister the life of God to others. Our participation in this fellowship demonstrates that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven who have been born of the Spirit. **Joh 3:5.**

Eating and drinking the communion is our commitment to minister the love of God to one another in the body of Christ. We do this by functioning according to our ability as the member of Christ's body whom the Father has made us to be. **1Co 12:18.** This ministry is our expression of faith obedience to the word of the Father.

Partaking of the altar

In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul taught that those who partake of the altar, by eating and drinking the elements of the communion, do so in faith for participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Paul described this as going with Christ 'outside the camp,' 'bearing His reproach'. **Heb 13:10-13**. The reproaches of Christ were the sufferings that He experienced at the hands of wicked men as He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary. **Act 2:22-23**. These reproaches were laid on Him by the Father when the Father made Him to be sin. **Psa 69:9. 2Co 5:21**. He suffered these reproaches as 'the body of sin'. Through baptism, and our ongoing participation in the communion, we are joined to the death that He died as the body of sin. Having been united in His death, we are also raised with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. **Rom 6:5**.

A son of God who partakes of communion in faith for the purpose of joining the reproach of Christ has been *illuminated* concerning the true riches that are found in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Like Paul, they have counted everything else in their life as loss for the sake of obtaining the eternal prize of Christ's *exanastasis* life. **Php 3:8**. The apostle Paul testified that he was continually pressing on to lay hold of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **Php 3:14**. The Scriptures record that Moses was also illuminated to see this reward. We read in the book of Hebrews, 'By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*; for he looked to the reward'. **Heb 11:24-26**.

Growing to firstfruits

Jesus said, 'But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.' **Mat 13:23**. It is helpful to recognise that the good ground reveals the principle of *firstfruits*. The firstfruits were an offering that the children of Israel made to God under the Law Covenant. They offered the first yield of the crops that they had sown each season. **Exo 23:19**. Notably, the term 'firstfruits' is based on the same Hebrew word for 'firstborn'. Paul described Christ as 'the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [or were dead]'. He noted that, although we all died *in Adam*, it is *in Christ* that we are made *alive*. **1Co 15:20-22**.

When Christ comes into our heart, we receive our name as a son of God. This is because the name of each son of God was written in Him before the foundation of the world. However, we are only *made alive with Him* when we are conformed to His death and to the fellowship of each offering event that Christ suffered on His journey from Gethsemane to Calvary.

Each suffering event that Christ endured on this journey was sufficient to kill Him. However, He came back from the death of sin by the resurrection life and power of God that was in His blood. **Heb 13:20-21**. He was brought back from the dead by the blood of the Everlasting Covenant as it was sprinkled on His body as a mercy seat, through the injuries caused by those who struck Him. As we continue in the fellowship of His sufferings as a member of His body, we are made alive from the death of sin with Him. Moreover, the *life* in His blood is *multiplied* to become our life. We are able to share this life with others as a part of the body of Christ, by the capacity of the Holy Spirit.

The sheaf of firstfruits

Significantly, Christ is our life, but He is not our name. While each son of God has a unique name, we all share the same life in Christ. This reality is revealed in the sheaf of firstfruits. We observe that Christ spoke of Himself as a grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died. **Joh 12:24**. Those who are conformed to His death, and are buried with Him, rise from the death of sin with Him. **Rom 6:4-5**. They are in Him, and He is in them. As each grain of wheat in a sheaf is unique, they, with Christ, are unique sons, but all share the same life with Him. Importantly, we note that Jesus, as the first Seed from which the rest have sprung, is the principal Seed in the sheaf of firstfruits.

This highlights the truth that the fruit that is brought forth on good ground is our participation as sons of God in the fellowship of Christ, the Sheaf of firstfruits. In this fellowship, we are no longer slaves of sin, whose fruit, or end, is death. **Rom 6:21**. Of course, death is the outcome for those whose hearts *remain* as 'wayside', 'stony' and 'thorny' ground. However, those who have been born of God live by His life, which is found in the culture of offering.

By the mercies of God, we present ourselves as living sacrifices in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Through this fellowship, we are set free from our slavery to sin, and can participate in our spiritual service of worship as slaves of righteousness. **Rom 12:1**. **Rom 6:18**. As *slaves of righteousness* who obey the doctrine of baptism, we obtain the fruit of our sanctification as sons of God. **Rom 6:22**. This means that we fulfil the Father's will for our lives by doing the works that belong to our name as sons of God in Christ. **1Th 4:3**. **Rom 12:2**. The outcome of living according to this way is eternal life. **Rom 6:22-23**.

A noble and good heart

Jesus likened the good ground to 'those who, having *heard the word with a noble and good heart*, keep it and *bear fruit with patience*'. **Luk 8:15**. It is notable that He said that the 'good-ground' person 'heard the word with a noble and good heart'. **Luk 8:15**. This is obviously not speaking about the first time that they heard the word of God. No-one has a noble and good heart before they are born of God. Presuming this to be true is a great error. The Scriptures are clear, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' **Jer 17:9**.

'A noble and good heart' belongs to a person who has been *born of God*. It is 'noble' because the person is expressing the authority of their name, which they received when they were born of incorruptible seed through the word of God. **1Pe 1:22-23**. Their heart is 'good' because it has been made new through regeneration, new birth, and baptism into Christ. Importantly, the authority that belongs to their sonship is revealed through *slavehood*. Christ demonstrated this principle. He was the Son of God and was crucified as the King of the Jews, yet His death on the cross was in obedience to the Father as a bondservant. **Mat 27:37. Php 2:5-8**.

A person who is good ground has been co-crucified with Christ. They no longer live by their own principle, or law, of life, but Christ lives in them and is their life. They now live, each day, by the faith of the Son of God. **Gal 2:20**. They receive, and live by, the faith of the Son of God by continuing to receive His word as it is proclaimed to them by His messengers and through body ministry at the communion. **Rom 10:17**. This is why Jesus said that those who receive His word on good ground are those who *continue* to hear the word.

FURTHER STUDY 1 PETER 1

Disciples of Christ

A 'good-ground' believer is a *disciple* of Christ. They have 'the tongue of the disciple' because they have received the same spirit of faith as Jesus received. **Isa 50:4. 2Co 4:13.** We receive faith as disciples because the Lord awakens our ear to hear as disciples. **Isa 50:4. Rom 10:17.**

Our speech, which is by faith, refers to our conduct and conversation in the fellowship of Christ's offering. In the same manner as Christ, we love others and give ourselves for one another. **Gal 2:20.** As disciples, we do not draw back from our fellowship in the afflictions of Christ, and we are being raised up by *exanastasis* life. We are able to minister this life to others so that they can be raised up and edified with us. **2Co 4:14.** Instead of provoking and prodding others in the manner of thorny ground, faith enables us 'to speak a word in season to him who is weary'. **Isa 50:4.** While this has a daily implication regarding the way that we speak and interact with one another in our houses, it also applies to our participation in body ministry when we gather for communion.

We must keep God's word and bear fruit with patience. This is not through our own capacity for patience. Rather, it is the patience of Jesus Christ. We note, in this regard, the way in which the apostle John identified himself – 'I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ'. **Rev 1:9.** This was the patience that Jesus demonstrated as He offered Himself by *Eternal Spirit*. **Heb 9:13-14.** We receive Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit. He joins us to the travail of Christ and enables us each day to endure with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. **Rom 8:26.** In this fellowship, all things work together for our good because we love God and are walking according to His will for our life. **Rom 8:27.** This is good fruit, indeed.

How do we respond?

We all experience distresses such as disputes, sicknesses, losses, accidents and injustices. At times, we make poor responses to these difficulties as we seek to preserve our lives. These responses, motivated by the other law, are sin, and they bring us under the condemnation of the Law.

How we respond in these situations will depend upon the mirror into which we look and from which we receive understanding and direction for our lives. We can either look into the mirror of our own fleshly perspective, which the Scriptures liken to a veil over the eyes of our heart, or we can look into the mirror of the face of Christ by receiving the word that is ministered by the Spirit at the communion table through the ministry of the members of the body of Christ.

A spiritual person is a son of God who is led by the Spirit of God. **Rom 8:14.** They are spiritual because they receive the ministry of the New Covenant at communion. That is, they turn to the Lord to receive His word that shines as light from the mirror of His face by the Spirit, through body ministry. Paul described this as the ministry of the Spirit who gives life. **2Co 3:5-6.** By this means, they receive illumination and faith for their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. **Joh 1:9. Rom 10:17.**

In the midst of their difficult circumstances, they recognise that Christ died their death and made it His death. As they, in Christ, now die this death with Him, they are able, by the Spirit, to put to death their carnal responses, thoughts and deeds, and to proceed with their obedience as a son of God. **Rom 8:13.** In contrast, the carnal Christian, motivated by the other law, will endeavour to use the Law of God to either justify or condemn their carnal responses. **Rom 2:14-15.**

Growing and maturing in Christ

By continuing to receive the ministry of the gospel, we are being progressively illuminated and transformed into the image of Christ's sonship. **Rom 8:29**. That is, we are progressively understanding who and what we are to become as sons of God as we participate in the fellowship of Christ's body. In fellowship, we receive the light of the gospel that shines from Christ's face. He is being formed within us as we communicate together in the fellowship of His offering. **Gal 4:19. Pro 27:17.**

As we grow from being babes in Christ, we mature and are able to put away childish things. **1Co 13:11**. By this means, the darkness of our own carnal way of living is passing away, and the light of our sonship is increasingly being revealed in Christ. As we mature, our spiritual sight becomes clearer. As the wise man noted, 'The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day'. **Pro 4:18**. When the perfect day has come, we will see Christ as He is. **1Jn 3:2**.

Paul also spoke to the Philippian church about attaining increasing levels of expression and maturity as sons of God. He said that the resurrection life that is in the Spirit of Christ, who dwells within us, gives to us the capacity to live as sons of God. He then spoke of walking by the rule of progressive attainment, writing, 'Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind'. **Php 3:16**.

In his epistle, James, the Lord's brother, called 'walking by the rule of progressive attainment', 'the perfect law of liberty'. **Jas 1:25**. He described the law of liberty as a 'mirror'. **Jas 1:23-25**. This mirror is the word that teaches us about our sonship, and proclaims what our works are to be, as well as teaching us how we are to relate together as sons of God.

The virtues of Christ

Virtue comes from the illumination of faith that we receive by hearing the word that Christ's blood speaks to us. As the apostle Peter explained, 'But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, *add to your faith virtue*, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ!* **2Pe 1:5-8**. In this passage of Scripture, Peter was describing the process by which we come to know Christ and are known by Him; that is, how we obtain *exanastasis*, or eternal life. **1Jn 5:20**.

'Virtue' refers to the qualities of *exanastasis* life that belong to a son of God, and are to increase in us as we live by the faith of the Son of God, which we receive by hearing His blood that speaks. **Rom 10:17**. **Heb 12:24**. The word that we receive must be mixed with faith in us in order for virtue to be revealed in our lives, enabling us to stand up in our name as sons of God. **Heb 4:2**. Those who are born of this life must proceed, through baptism, to become members in particular of Christ's body. **1Co 12:27**. In other words, Christ must be formed in every hearer if they are to be functional members of the body of Christ. **Gal 4:19**. Body ministry will not be effective unless we understand what it means to be members of the body of Christ.

So, how is Christ formed within a person? It is through *travail*. When Paul admonished the Galatians for departing from the Spirit to live according to the endeavours and expression of their own flesh, he said to them, 'My little children, for whom I labour [travail] in birth again until Christ is formed in you.' **Gal 4:19**. Paul was referring to his fellowship in the travail of Christ in Gethsemane.

Messengers of Christ

Messengers of Christ are joined to Christ's travail, which is the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, so that their hearers will receive the faith of the Son of God through the word that they preach. They minister in weakness, speaking in Christ, in the sight of God. **2Co 12:19**. Through their ministry, Christ's blood speaks to their hearers because the messengers are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering, through which His blood was sprinkled, and His life was multiplied to become the life of those who joined His offering. Those who then receive this faith by hearing the word that is preached by God's messengers, are joined to the same travail as those who travail for them.

This was Paul's point when he testified, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God ... and our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation'. **2Co 1:3-4,7**.

A true messenger of Christ will have a weak, traving profile of ministry. They will be putting off any other fleshly mode of ministry that uses bodily presence and self-promoting ministry expression to provoke a response from their hearers, and to gain adherents to their teaching. Those who pursue such carnal approaches to ministry are endeavouring to minister in the mode of the angels, who are created full of wisdom, and who are mighty in strength and power. **Psa 103:20. Eze 28:12-13**. Paul described all fleshly approaches to ministry as 'hidden things of shame', which he and his fellow presbyters had renounced. **2Co 4:2**.

Holding fast to Christ

The apostle Paul testified concerning his own mode of ministry by saying, 'Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.' **1Co 9:26-27**. Likewise, we must not be uncertain about the gospel of sonship, nor regarding our fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Neither can we fight as one who 'beats the air', as though a form of fleshly ministry has any capacity to bring change or deliverance to a hearer. To think that it can bring change and can minister life is to be deceived as one who ministers without simplicity or godly sincerity. **2Co 1:12**. Instead, we must 'run' as those who are obtaining their sonship by receiving the blood that speaks, and by living in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

It is essential that we hold fast to the Head of the body, who is Yahweh Son, 'from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God'. **Col 2:18-19**. We hold fast to Christ, the Head, through fellowship with those who are part of the star-messengers who are in His right hand. These are the lamp presbyteries of Christ's churches. **Rev 1:20. 1Jn 1:1-4**.

We, who are the members of the body of Christ, are the petals of the flower into which the lamp of the Lord is placed. We are able to participate in the reflecting of the light of the lamp as Christ is being formed in us, and as the love of God is being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. **Rom 5:5**. It is through this ministry that the body of Christ is able to make increase of itself in love. **Eph 4:15-16**.



Restoring
my Soul