



March 21, 2025

How Does the Gift of Faith Come to Us?

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We who are baptized members and have had hands laid on us by an elder in the church of God will participate in this most meaningful ceremony of Passover three weeks from tonight.

We are admonished by the apostle Paul, "*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).

You and I should have acknowledged that we desperately need the sacrifice of Christ and His shed blood to forgive and cleanse us of our sins. It is our sins that have required the death of the unblemished sinless Lamb of God. "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:8-9) This is one of the most soul-searching yet encouraging statements in John's writings.

Before and until we repent of our sins we remain guilty of causing the need for the suffering and death of our Savior. Once we sincerely repent and seek forgiveness, that guilt is lifted. We all still struggle with our carnal mind which does not want to submit to the laws of God. But with God's power through the help of His spirit we can resist sin and commit to practicing righteousness.

You and I must exercise faith in this process, and in the mercy of God and faith in what Christ accomplished for us. Even this faith is something God provides for us. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."* (Ephesians 2:8).

So, how does that gift of faith come to us?

Do we suddenly have an impulse out of nowhere? No. We need to receive it with Godly knowledge, wisdom and understanding. We need Christ's mind in us. (Philippians 2:5) It's a process.

Again, Paul tells us, *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17) We must participate in an educating and knowledge seeking process along with endeavor. In Paul's day most people acquired knowledge of the Word of God by hearing it read at the synagogue or temple. Today we all have personal Bibles, and also hear the Scriptures read and expounded at our holy convocations. This is one of the many reasons it's so vitally important to attend worship services either in person or online. Not only do we hear God's Word from those teaching us, but also in fellowship with one another.

The discussion of the Word of God has dwindled in many fellowships over the years. Politics, sports, weather, and our jobs often fill the time. Might we consider a change in our discussions?

Perhaps the most concise instructions concerning the steps that lead to being "converted" and then receiving salvation are found in the message delivered by the Apostle Peter when he preached to the crowd assembled on the Day of Pentecost when the Apostles were empowered with the Holy Spirit.

Many of those assembled were convicted by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge their sins and seek God's direction. Peter responded to their question of *"what to do next?"* - *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*

for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

John the Baptist and Peter (as we saw above), emphasized the need to repent before one was baptized. So then, what does one repent of? What does one turn from? What is one forgiven of upon repentance?

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Romans 4:7) Repentance of sin and turning from breaking God's laws precede baptism, and the cleansing of the record of sins and receiving God's Spirit after.

Once forgiven of sin, we are expected to both practice righteousness and live by the instructions in God's Word (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 3:10).

Jesus responded to one who came to Him and asked, *"what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* (Matthew 19:16) Jesus responded, ". . . *But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*" (v.17) Note that the discussion was not about "earning" eternal life. We cannot earn it. Too many Christians today still are trying to somehow earn salvation. It is given by grace to those who satisfy the conditions.

The apostle James declared, *"Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* (James 2:17-18) Mere lip service is empty words. Simply going to church does not suffice. Simply "giving our heart to the Lord" doesn't cut it. Our deeds of how we live and think must accompany our Christian calling and profession.

Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3 when He stated ". . . *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*" (Matthew 4:4) Yes, we must exercise genuine effort to receive salvation. *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much*

more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."
(Philippians 2:12)

Works of any kind cannot justify us or save us by themselves. But works and obedience remain vital in demonstrating that we have faith and have repented.

On Saturday evening, April 12, we will have begun the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These upcoming days are not just the seven days of putting out sin. That's important yes, but notice what *eating* unleavened bread during these seven days symbolizes. "*It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.*" (Exodus 13:9).

Coming out of sin requires God living in us. Galatians 2:20 clearly shows that Godly faith comes from Christ actively living in us.

I wish you a meaningful Passover, and Feast of Unleavened Bread, as you practice righteousness in your thoughts, motives, and actions, repenting daily and seeking God's will in your lives.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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