

Chapter Three: The Firstfruits of Living in Christ The Restoration and Nurture of Your Own Soul

As the title of this chapter suggests, the entire content of this chapter can be summed up in saying that the firstfruits of living in Jesus are simply the restoration and nurture of your own soul. Let me ask you a question: How can a person love if he's never experienced or seen love? The simple answer is that he can't. Or how can a person show others the joy of Jesus if he's never experienced the joy in his own life? Can a man teach others the rest and power of Jesus Christ if he's never rested or lived with the power himself? Obviously not. The same goes for us. Until our own souls are restored and comforted, we can in no way restore or comfort the souls of others. Thus, new believers in Jesus Christ need to first and foremost thoroughly experience the restoration of their own souls in rest, assurance, joy, love, freedom, power, and righteousness. In other words, we have to rest, gain strength, and grow up healthy before we can work. Nothing is expected of babes in Jesus Christ just as nothing is expected of babies in this world. Babes in Christ are to rest and enjoy their childhood, get a good education in the salvation of Jesus Christ and grow up healthy, strong, and wise. If they do this they will be well equipped and able to instruct in word and deed the believers who are to follow them.

Everybody wants to bear fruit for the Lord, but just as a seed can't bear fruit before it grows into a tree or some other plant, neither can we bear fruit before we grow up. Just as a seed needs plenty of sun, water, and nutrients from the earth, we believers need plenty of sun, water, and nutrients from our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus sums this up when he says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, and ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

(John 15:4-5) Thus, it is through Jesus that we live and breathe and have our being. He makes us who we are and he is the one who works in us to bear fruit. In other words, fruit doesn't come from our own efforts and activities regardless of how sincere they may be. "But I want to work for the Lord," one might say. At first, this might seem like an appropriate and honorable desire, but young believers first have to learn that before they can minister unto the Lord and work for him, they have to let the Lord minister unto them. (John 13:4-8) Notice that Jesus says that fruit comes from "abiding" in him. I like this word "abiding" because it means that we are to stay in the Lord Jesus. We are not to run around looking for ways to make him happy, but we are to rest in him and let him work: "For without me ye can do nothing." He works through us, but before he can work through us, he needs to restore us. As I mentioned in Chapter One, when a person believes in the Savior Jesus, he is in fact set free from sin and made perfect. His entire life becomes a transition from one glorious state to another glorious state of goodness. This goodness begins with the restoration of his own soul. Thus, we as the branches partake in Jesus' goodness and change from good to good as we abide in him. In other words, we are changed into his image as we partake in his goodness. As he is good, so are we. (1 John 4:17) We live as Jesus lives. To say it again, we are changed into his image.

Now, if there be anybody in doubt of these things, I would like you to consider the following question: How did Jesus live before he carried out his calling of Savior of the world? I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Jesus spent the first 30 years of his life as a normal person working a normal job. He spent 30 years learning the goodness of the Father before he spent three and a half years preaching the gospel, healing the sick and oppressed, and dying for the sins of the world. In other words, even though Jesus was born Son of God and holy and perfect, he spent 30 years of his life growing in the grace, wisdom, and strength of his Father. It is the same for us. Before we can work

for Jesus, we must learn from him and receive his rest. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me... and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-30) I like what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:6. “The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.” In other words, workers need to personally partake in the goodness of the fruits themselves before they can be of any use in administering the fruits to others. Paul states in Galatians 5:22-23 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. It is through experiencing these fruits first in our own lives that we can make them manifest to others.

I would like to spend the rest of this chapter talking more specifically about the firstfruits of believing in Jesus Christ. I believe that all of the fruits of believing in Jesus are related and connected in that they all come out of the same source, which is Jesus Christ and his gospel. Therefore, I might be very repetitive at times, but I believe this is okay and needful. The firstfruits that I will be talking about specifically are the fruits of resting, learning and becoming established in the Gospel, and personally experiencing Jesus' love, goodness, and joy. In addition to these, I will also be talking about the fruit of realizing the purpose of our lives as Christians.

Before moving on in our discussion, however, I would like to make one very important clarification that requires our complete attention and understanding. What I would like to clarify is that which I mentioned above, namely, that all fruits flow out of the same source, which is Jesus and his gospel. Realizing this truth opens our eyes to the fact that we actually do not need to focus on the fruits at all. Rather, we should give all attention to the source of the fruits. When our eyes are on Jesus, the goodness of Jesus and the fruits of his salvation flow out of our hearts freely and naturally. Nothing is needed other than faith in Jesus Christ. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Faith in Jesus is very practical. Yes, faith is

practical for living! We need nothing else. Fruits are just the result of believing; thus, it is purely academic discussion to talk about the fruits themselves. In other words, fruits are the natural consequence of believing on the Savior. We should never attempt to bear our own fruit. As Jesus said, “Without me you can do nothing.” So, please always keep in mind that “belief in Jesus” equals an abundance of fruit. Jesus works in us to bear the fruits that he wants. He makes and shapes us according to his will to accomplish his own glorious purpose for his body. Thus, as a body has many parts, so are we. Believers in Jesus often look and live very differently. What we have in common, however, is that we all believe in Jesus and love him and his body, which is the church. To sum up, our entire focus must always be on Jesus. With this in mind, I realize that I run the risk of causing some to stumble by writing about the fruits of believing (I fear that some will take their focus off of Jesus and put it on the fruits of believing.) However, in order to provide believers with some solid encouragement, guidance, and teaching about what the Christian life looks like in general, I think it is right and important to write in detail about the fruits of Jesus' salvation. Therefore, the remainder of this book will continue to deal in particular with our life in Christ.

To start, I would like to mention a few things about the concept of rest. Rest implies that there is no obligation of work charged or assigned to any of those who believe in Jesus. This means that believers in Jesus need not even lift a finger if they so choose. This also means that there is no obligation or duty to get involved in church activities or programs. This privilege of resting gives believers the freedom to do as they want. Understanding this right of ours in Jesus is a great relief to many who are wearied and heavy laden. It is also a great encouragement to the greatest gift of the Spirit, which is love. Love can never be made perfect where there is law and obligation because where there is law and obligation, there is fear. (Romans 4:15 and 1 John 4:18)

Now I know at this point that there are probably a few persons who are offended by this concept of rest. My response is simply that this is what the Bible teaches. Believers in Jesus are saved without any consideration being given to works. (John 6:47, Romans 3:28, and Romans 4:5-6) This is the grace of God. (Romans 4:4) In order to make my point clear, however, let me just say that I have stated that we have the freedom to rest, not the obligation to be lazy. Having the freedom to rest does not imply that we will spend our whole lives doing nothing. Quite to the contrary, all those who believe in Jesus, and thus take part in his rest, will bear an abundance of fruit unto God the Father. The fruit that believers bear is borne naturally. It is borne from the goodness of their hearts and not out of fear of being whipped or out of zeal of receiving rewards.

Experiencing this spiritual rest helps our bodies, minds, and souls to heal. Moreover, rest helps to restore us to a state of calmness and it gives us the opportunity to focus our attention on our Savior Jesus without having to worry about anything else. For example, if we were to see Jesus as a teacher, our whole desire would be to be found acceptable and righteous before him. As a result of this, we would never be able to focus on him with hearts of adoration, for we would be working for him in order to receive his acceptance and rewards. In such a case, we wouldn't be able to rest or receive his free grace and love. However, when we see him as 100% Savior, then we can enter into his free rest, and it is through this that we can without fear and distraction attend unto his adoration and praise while receiving and experiencing the fullness of his salvation presented to us in the Gospel.

This brings me to the next firstfruit that I want to mention, namely, learning and personally becoming established in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To clarify, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scripture. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) This

salvation is imputed to all persons who simply believe the message. (Ephesians 1:13-14 and John 6:47) Learning and becoming established in the Gospel is something that we grow in over our whole lives, but at the same time, a certain fundamental knowledge of the Gospel is needed so that we be not “carried to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” that blows our way. (Ephesians 4:14) Also, learning and becoming established in the Gospel is something that should be quite desirable to us. This is because the Gospel is the message of our salvation and in it we find the riches of our inheritance. As we read in John 6:47, this salvation is not only something we can enjoy in the next life, but it is something that is real, practical, and enjoyable for this life too. As it is written in Romans 1:16, “[the Gospel of Christ] is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Thus, the Gospel of Jesus possesses the power to set you free from your sins and from all of your enemies so that you can serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life. (Luke 1:74-75) Jesus came so that we could have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10) The power of this abundant life is found in him through believing his words, which he spoke to us through his Gospel. Therefore, learning and becoming established in the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be top priority for believers in Jesus. The reason I didn't mention this first was because of the sad tendency that exists today, namely, that of burdening babes in Christ with activities and ceremonies the moment a confession of faith leaves their lips. They need to learn and become established in the Gospel, but the sad truth is that they often don't have the time because they are too busy doing and learning other things. Some don't even realize the need and the benefit of learning the Gospel. Therefore, it is for these reasons that I mentioned the firstfruit of resting first.

I spoke in detail about some of the major effects of believing in Jesus in the second half of Chapter One. (pages 8-21) The salvation of Jesus is presented to us in the form of a promise,

sealed with his very own blood at the cross. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” The benefits that I mentioned included coming into a relationship of peace, love, dependency, and friendship with Jesus as well as experiencing the power, perfection, and freedom of the sons of God. It would be well worth it to re-read those pages again to refresh your mind and spirit in the greatness of the Gospel given unto us. These truths in Jesus Christ are very important elements of our education as Christians. Truth sets free and learning the riches of Jesus will empower us to live a life of joy, love, righteousness, and power. (John 8:32)

Another firstfruit that is very much related to learning and becoming established in the Gospel is the experiencing of Jesus' love, goodness, and joy. Oh, there is no explaining how vital this is to the restoration and prosperity of the soul! Let me just say that the more we learn about and experience Jesus' love toward us, the more wonderful and abundant our lives are, filled with compassion, gentleness, and goodness. It is through the love of Jesus that love blossoms in our own hearts and we become a great consolation unto others.

I venture to say that there are many people who have believed on Jesus, but still don't really know the love of Jesus. They know Jesus mainly as a strict and demanding Master who breathes out threats of damnation and only offers eternal life to a select few who are able to keep his rules well enough. These types of people hear about Jesus, but it is not the Savior Jesus who saves people for free out of the goodness of his heart. Instead it is a half-savior Jesus who offers to save people if they are good enough disciples. Thus, these types of people don't live their lives from faith to faith, but from repentance to repentance. (Their confessions and repentance never end.) These types of people don't live their lives from glory to glory, but from fear to fear. Let me just say that if you see Jesus in this way, you are not experiencing the love of God. While it is true that our God is a consuming fire and that his

name and vengeance are dreadful above all else, it is also true that he is a God of grace and love who sent Jesus into the world, not to judge the world, but to save it. I say to you that if you want to be saved and experience everlasting life, you must believe in the Savior Jesus. Jesus Christ is the expression of God's love and we are to receive this love. We read in 1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Also, we read in 1 John 4:8-10 "...For God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In addition, John 3:16 is a familiar and wonderful verse: "For God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." As I mentioned just above, this is the message that we are to receive and believe. We must become fully acquainted with the love of God toward our souls. John goes on to write in John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us." So, this is why I say that receiving Jesus' love and goodness is a firstfruit of believing on him. We must learn thoroughly that he is a God of love and that his thoughts toward us are not judgmental, but full of compassion, grace, mercy, and goodness. We must learn that goodness and mercy shall follow us all of the days of our lives. We must learn that it is his goodness that leads us to true repentance. (Romans 2:4) This is part of our inheritance from the Lord God. When we don't believe the love that God has toward us, we will always live in fear and bondage. However, when we know and believe his love toward us, we are set free and perfect love casts out all fear. It is through knowing the love of God in Jesus Christ that we learn how to love and become perfect in love. (1 John 4:18) Before young believers attempt to do anything else, they must be established in this truth of Jesus' love toward them. When believers are established in this truth everyday is wonderful and

brilliant and fantastic. Every day is an outpouring of goodness and joy. Regardless of how hard the labors, pains, and struggles in this world may be, it is well with their souls. They are grounded and settled in peace. Their heartsong goes “Oh, Jesus, my love. You are my greatest thought and thoughts of you are the pleasure of my day. Oh, how sweet it is to dwell in your love!”

I believe that Jesus' joy is connected to his love. When we know and believe the love he has for us, we often can't help but feel an overflowing sense of joy, praise, and thanksgiving. Abiding in the joy of Jesus and his salvation is very important for us as we live in this world. This world is evil and the Bible teaches that we believers battle with the powers of darkness while we live here. (Galatians 1:4 and Ephesians 6:12) Thus, there are many forces against our souls that would like to rob us of our joy and our inheritance in Jesus. However, Jesus has given us everlasting life, so we certainly have power over all enemies, regardless of whom they may be. We have to go on in full faith believing that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (Romans 8:37) I believe that one good way to stay in the joy of Jesus is to always keep in mind the glory that is to follow. Personally, I just love daydreaming about Jesus and the glories that are in heaven. I like thinking about what he is doing now and what those who have already passed into glory are doing. No doubt that they are singing his praises and rejoicing in their God! I love thinking about the fact that I will be there soon with all other believers. I love daydreaming about the gathering of all saints in glory. I love daydreaming about seeing him face to face. In other words, it is good to keep one's mind on the things to come and not on the things of this world, which are about to pass away. There is no denying that the problems in this world are real and troubling, but we must not be overwhelmed by them. Paul writes about this when he says, “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus...for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed

day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:14-18)

I'd like to relate a story I once heard from a brother in Christ. He was telling a story about a funeral he attended for a dear Christian friend. At the time of the man's funeral, all the believers in attendance were rejoicing in God for his goodness. Among those in attendance was a man who was not familiar with Christian funerals. He was shocked to see the joy on people's faces even though they were attending the funeral of a dear friend. This man asked the brother to explain the reason for everyone's joy because he just couldn't figure it out. The brother responded that while everyone was not happy by the death of their friend, they were filled with the joy of Jesus knowing that one day they would be reunited with their friend in heaven in the presence of Jesus and all other believers. The brother's point was that in this life there are times when we are not happy, but our joy in Jesus transcends all things. We see eternal things, so temporal things, no matter how bad they may be, cannot extinguish the joy and the power we have in Jesus. Yes! We have Jesus and we are in Jesus! We overcome all things! Let's keep this joy with us at all times!

Finally, I would like to speak about the firstfruit of realizing the purpose of our lives as Christians. We can never underestimate the importance of this realization simply for the reason that there is so much misunderstanding about what the purpose of the Christian life is. In 1 John 3:23, we read, “And this is [God's] commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” This is the sum of the Christian life. It is this simple. This is a message for children and only children can receive it. Hallelujah! We are to believe in Jesus and love one another. That's all!

As I wrote in Chapter Two, we are to continue in the simple

faith that we had the moment we believed in Jesus. Paul makes reference to this when he says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” John also mentions this at the end of his first letter when he tells believers in Jesus Christ his purpose for writing to them: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13) He makes it clear that everyone who believes on Jesus has eternal life and should continue to believe on him. Thus, it is not as if we believe on Jesus for salvation, but then move on, as if it were, beyond faith. There is nothing beyond faith in Jesus. We live and breathe and have our being in him. We take him at his word and trust that he is living in us and working in us to make us a wonderful body of believers.

Next, as believers in Jesus, we are to love each other. As I mentioned before, this is not something that we are to try really hard to do, but it is something that naturally comes out of our hearts through the workings of the Spirit as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, all who believe in Jesus bear the fruit of love naturally. He is the vine and we are the branches. He works through us to bear this most lovely and precious fruit. Love is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit. Love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10) In addition, we read that in Jesus Christ nothing matters except for faith which works by love. (Galatians 5:6)

We live in a day when many people would have you believe that the purpose of the Christian life is summed up in preaching the Gospel to the unsaved world. This is a mistake, however. There can be no doubt about the importance of missions work, evangelism, and preaching the Gospel to the lost, but this is not the purpose of our lives. Preaching the Gospel to the lost is just one of the fruits of the love that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, if we believe in Jesus and love one another, the unsaved world will come to know about Jesus. Jesus made reference to this

very same thing when he said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35) He made a similar conclusion in his prayer to the Father when he said: “That they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:21) The will of God is that we believers love one another. Believers loving fellow believers. That is all. Nothing too grand. Nothing too hard. (1 John 5:3) If we believers love one another, we will truly become one and perfect, and unbelievers will come to know that the Father sent Jesus into the world. (John 17:23)

The conclusion of it all is that “we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” However, before we can begin to keep this commandment, we have to fully realize that it is indeed the purpose of our lives as Christians. We must throw off every temptation to complicate the Christian life. Methods, systems, activities, and so on must never be made to replace the simplicity and the greatness of God's purpose for our lives as Christians. If we believe in Jesus, everything else and everything big will come naturally. We have to believe this.

In this chapter we looked at the firstfruits of believing in Jesus. The firstfruits of the Christian life are truly the restoring and nurturing of one's own soul. Just as children eventually grow up to become adults, so do babes in Christ. (1 John 2:12-14) However, if babes in Christ are not fed and raised properly, they will never grow up at all. I pray that this chapter has been able to comfort and establish some young ones. The whole of this chapter and the previous one can be thought to be a sort of introduction to the Christian life. In the next two chapters, we will be examining the Christian life in even greater detail. In Chapter Four, we will continue to look at the Christian life from the point of view of individual believers. We will do this in light of 1 John 3:23, quoted above. In Chapter Five, we will conclude this book by looking at

God's general and grand purpose for the body of Jesus Christ, the church.