



December 3, 2023

“God’s Family is Missional”

SS 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

News:

★ **Wednesday Evenings at Alêtheia 6:30-8:00** ★

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ADVENT HOPE, Romans 15:13, Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The entire theme of chapter 20 is...

Imagine a toddler...

How do you explain the lack of Agapê in the church?

Inaccurate and incomplete understanding of Christianity by Believers must be corrected over time, but Jesus does not wait for that to happen before He _____ Believers as _____ of His Gospel.

Why?

Can you be all things to all people?

JOHN 20:19–23, 19Now when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were together due to fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, “Peace be to you.” 20And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be to you; just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

All of a sudden Jesus was standing in the room with them...

Jesus said "_____."

Under the Old Covenant, peace was always...

What Jesus was announcing was the...

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

So, on Sunday, the Christian church was...

Jesus showed them His wounds...

Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

What about Acts chapter two?

Interpret Scripture in its own context and then find out how that affects doctrine, not the other way around.

"Breathed," as in the Breath of God is Hebrew רִיחַ (řü-äx), and the Greek πνεῦμα (pnü-mä)...

Here it is the word, ἐμφυσάω (ěm-fü-sä-ō). Ezekiel 21:31, Genesis 2:7, Ezekiel 37:9&10.

Jesus commanded them to "Receive the Holy Spirit." A command implies choice.

Notice that bracketing this bestowal of new and eternal life is a commissioning.

God is a Missionary.

Verse 23...

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
 Phone _____ Email _____



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the gospel of
JOHN

ΕΝΑΡΧΗ Η ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΛΟΓΟΣ ΗΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΗΝ
ΘΗΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΕ ΤΗΝ ΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΣΥ ΤΟΣ ΗΝ ΕΝΑΡΧΗ ΠΡΟΣ
ΤΟΝ ΘΗΝ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΓΕΝΕΤΟ ΚΑΙ ΧΩΡΙΣ



Advent Hope, Romans 15:13, Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



As we saw last week the entire theme of chapter 20 is the evolving belief of people from very rudimentary, even mistaken conceptualizations about Jesus to a fuller and more accurate recognition of Who He is.

How many times did we see Jesus during His earthly ministry try to correct the misapprehensions and false impressions people had about Him? All three Synoptic Gospels record Jesus wondering aloud "You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matthew 17:17, etc.).

It is extremely rare for a person to learn all about Jesus and His New Covenant that we call Christianity and then choose to believe. Normally, people come to some sort of a crisis in their life and turn to Jesus without knowing much about Him or what Christianity entails. Initially it's a belief in a mostly erroneous caricature of Christ and His church that they must get corrected. Every Christian remains in that boat to a degree – hopefully an ever-lessening degree. Whatever a person's particular journey, we all have tremendous room for growth in knowing Jesus and in knowing what it is to be like Him.

This chapter is about that – it's about growing in faith, not just quantitatively but qualitatively as well.



Imagine a toddler who simply decided to quit maturing. No more growing up for him. He just refused to learn anything more whether academically or experientially. Refused to talk, refused to gain coordination, refused to be potty trained, refused to improve his social skills and refused to contribute any effort at all in caring for himself or others.

There isn't a parent on earth who wouldn't take that kid to every expert they could think of, pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, priests, whatever to find out what was wrong with their child and get him fixed!

Yet, it is quite standard practice for Christians to behave in exactly that way. People talk about the faith of various groups as being a mile wide but only an inch deep. What I'm saying, is that's an apt description for many, many Christians.



How else do you explain the lack of Agapê in the church? How else do you explain the fact that the only difference non-Christians see in Christians is that we try harder to hide our deviant behavior? How else do you explain the rarity of Christians ministering to others on Christ's behalf?

In this chapter we see two things in Christianity that go hand-in-hand and they are first, a weaker and less

accurate faith that evolves into a stronger and more accurate faith and second, the immediate commissioning of Christians by Jesus as His ministers.

Notice that inaccurate and incomplete understanding of Christianity by Believers must be corrected over time, but Jesus does not wait for that to happen before He commissions Believers as ministers of His Gospel.



Why? The fastest and easiest and best way to become a better pilot is to teach others how to fly. Likewise, the fastest and easiest and best way to mature as a Christian is to quit focusing on yourself, and with your eyes on Jesus, get busy about being His hands and feet in this world.

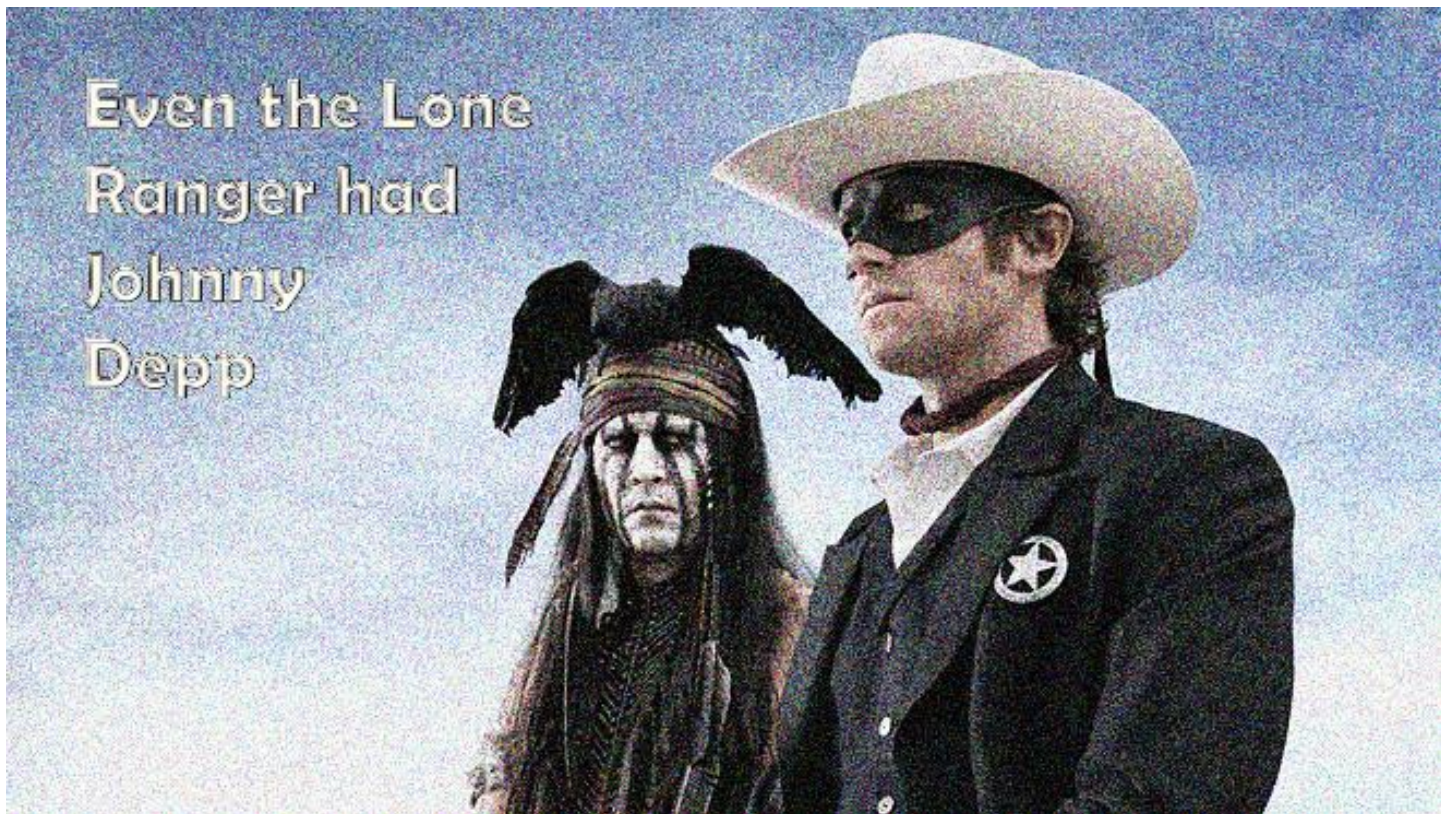


It's been a while since I told this story so here goes... When I was doing the infantry portion of my Marine Corps training, we were on what's called a force march. Full combat gear, rifle, and heavy backpack moving at a very fast hiking pace up and down the hills in oppressive heat. After several hours of this, I still didn't know how far we had to go, but I knew that however far it was, I couldn't make it.

My inner thighs were rubbed raw and bleeding, I had blisters on my feet, the charging handle of my M-16 had cut my hand, I was exhausted, and I was about to collapse in failure. Just as I was about to fall out, our drill instructor threw the smallest guy in our platoon into

my arms and said to me and the squad leader next to me, "Carry him."

Well, there was no way. I couldn't make it carrying me and my gear, let alone carrying half of another dude and his gear. It was impossible. I was in too much pain. But my focus shifted to coordinating with the other squad leader in carrying this guy. I didn't have time to think about my weakness and before I knew it, we had finished. Quit worrying about you and focus on Jesus, focus on the mission He has given you, focus on others and before you know it you will have finished your course.



Here's another part of the pie, you cannot be all things to all people. Your ministry will be very narrow in scope. The Bible explains that, by saying, that no individual is the whole body. Each Christian is only a small part of the Body of Christ. Your ministry must be part of the larger ministry of a local church family in order to be whole.

There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity – this is a team sport my friends. The church is the Body, and it only works when we are all doing our part. When that happens the church as a whole and the people who make her up all grow in Christ and He is glorified



John 20:19–23, 19Now when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were together due to fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, “Peace be to you.” 20And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be to you; just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

John very carefully informs us that it was the evening of that same day – Easter Sunday – the day of the week that would ever after be known as the “Lord’s Day,” just as John used that title in Revelation 1:9&10, “I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet...” On that first Christian Sunday, Jesus’

disciples, including ten of the Apostles, were together locked away in fear of the Jews.

There was no doubt some residual fear due to the execution of their leader, but probably renewed fear because the Jewish leaders would have known by now that Jesus' body was missing. Their first thought would have been that His disciples took it, and they would have been extremely keen on getting it back to dispel any chance that rumors of a return from the dead was possible.

Both Peter and John, as well as a few women, were there to confirm the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene was there insisting that she had actually seen Jesus and received her commission to pass His Words along to the group. Yet they are all crowded in a locked room afraid that the Temple police, or some Roman soldiers would soon descend upon them.



All of a sudden Jesus was standing in the room with them. Imagine that! The way John narrates Jesus' arrival in their midst is interesting and ironically, it leads people in the two directions that he hoped to prevent. Sometimes you really need to accept what a person said, rather than trying to figure out what they meant.

Some people read it and say there is nothing explicitly miraculous about His appearance (evidently forgetting that He was completely dead and entombed in a rock-cut crypt just a few hours earlier). They say John didn't specify how Jesus got into the room, so it could have simply been that they let him in through the door.

The opposite approach that John was trying to avoid is the focus of some people on the supernatural nature of the appearance and their preoccupation with the type of body Jesus now had and extrapolating from there the type of body we will have in the Millennium or even Heaven.

John was clearly conveying that Jesus appeared by supernatural means but downplayed it because he did not want people to be too distracted by that and miss Jesus Himself. He didn't walk in through an opened door which is supercool, but we are not meant to focus our attention on that as though it was some sort of entertaining magic show. Our focus is meant to be riveted on Jesus, not all the other things, such as the reaction of the disciples or the nature of a Resurrected body.



Jesus said “Shalom.” It is the Jewish greeting that basically means “Peace be to you.” That’s what it has become because of what it originally meant. To find the impact of the Words in that moment rolling off of the Risen Lord’s lips we need to understand the prophetic use in the Old Testament. There the “peace” is the literal blessing of peace between God and a person. It is right relationship where the person has ceased fighting God by sinning against Him. The war is over, the peace treaty is in place and actual peace reigns. Under the Old Covenant, that peace was always temporary. Sacrifice a lamb, sprinkle its blood on the old Mercy Seat in the old Temple and you were at peace with God... Probably for about 5 minutes.

What Jesus was announcing was the enduring peace through Him and His completed work. Most of us still have the same legalistic mindset of the ancient Jews. We think that we pray in the morning asking God to forgive us and we feel peace with God because of our penitence and then five minutes later we've gone right back to sinning against Him and the peace is tainted or even lost until we pray for forgiveness again.

Not so under the New Covenant. In Christ we are entirely forgiven. His blood is sufficient, and it covers over all our sin past, present, and future. We are no longer guilty, but we are not good either. Jesus then clothes us in His righteous robes, and we are forensically seen by Almighty God as perfectly holy, perfectly at peace with Him.

That's what Jesus bought for you with His sacrifice. The Apostle Paul, the greatest theologian of all time and the guy responsible for about half of the New Testament included in every Letter he wrote a greeting of peace and grace. Both Peter and John got into the act with their Letter's as well. It is commonly, "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What it means is that because of the

throne of grace – the new Mercy Seat – given to us by the Father through Jesus we have peace with God. That peace with God, enables peace with God’s plan, peace with our lot in life, peace with the church, peace with the world, and even peace with our self.

That’s the Fruit of the Holy Spirit peace – not a peaceful, easy feeling, but actual peace that leads to a peaceful, easy feeling. What comes after peace? Patience. Better thought of as long-suffering. “You cannot be long-suffering until you’ve first been long bothered.” It is to hold your anger and you can only do that when you are at peace. Peace is way cool!



So, on Sunday, the first day of the week, on the first day of the Resurrection, on the first day of true enduring peace with God, the Christian church was born as Jesus Himself breathed new life into His disciples who were, for the first time gathered together on their own. The New Body of Jesus Christ on earth began on Sunday.

As we've seen already, there is so much going on with John's seemingly simplistic writing style that we can't cover all the nuance. I'll try to give you enough to pique your interest but not so much that I wear you out.



Jesus showed them His wounds not merely to prove that it was Him, and not only to show that He wasn't

some kind of phantasm, ghost, specter, or spook, but to literally show exactly what the Prophet Isaiah had foretold as the basis for the peace that Jesus had just proclaimed to them. “Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5b).

As Jesus showed them His scars His disciples rejoiced just as He had foretold four chapters earlier when He said, “Truly, truly I say to you that you will weep and mourn... but your grief will be turned into joy!” He equated what His disciples would go through to childbirth and concluded, “Therefore you will have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one is going to take your joy away from you” (John 16:20-22).

Jesus said again, “Shalom,” “Peace be with you.” It confirms that it wasn’t just a greeting, and it confirms that the source of peace was His sacrificial death conquering sin, death, and the grave, once and for all.



Verse 22, where Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” is highly controversial, perhaps contradictory, or at least confusing in light of the account in Acts chapter 2. Really the only reason that it is problematic is that people come at this verse with preconceived ideas, instead of doing good Bible interpretation.

When we have a Passage that touches on something that we already understand as a major doctrine from elsewhere in the Bible, we tend to focus on making it fit within that framework, instead of simply approaching it as it is first. It’s why I’m not a huge fan of systematic theology or topical sermons.

In this case, we have an extensive narrative in the opening chapters of the Book of Acts where the disciples were specifically told to go back to the city and wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That happened on the Day of Pentecost 50 days after Jesus died and a week after He ascended into Heaven. The Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples in the Upper Room and they began the active ministry of the church to the world on that day.

How does this verse in John's Gospel square with all of that? Well, that's exactly the wrong question. We must interpret this verse in this context and then find out how that affects our doctrine not the other way around.

Coming at any part of the Bible with our doctrine and then working the text over until it fits our theology is the kind of poor scholarship that has fostered all manner of ridiculous and conflicting doctrines within Christianity.

The first issue is the word "breathed," and as a translation choice actually demonstrates a bias. We know that throughout the Bible the Spirit of God is equated with the breath of God. In fact, the Hebrew word for the Spirit רוח (rü-äx), and the Greek word for

the Spirit πνεῦμα (pnü-mä), can both mean “breath,” or “wind,” as well as “spirit.”

There are different words to mean a “breath.” Biblically, when we are talking about the spirit of a person, or the Holy Spirit, it is exclusively the Hebrew and Greek words already mentioned. Here, in our target verse, it is not. Here it is the word, ἐμφυσάω (ěm-fü-sä-ō), a word no doubt related to the Latin infusio from which we get our word infuse. What it means in Greek is to “blow.” For them, like us, it’s a more forceful, more intentional type of breath and one that is definitely an exhale where to breathe is thought of more as an inhale. In the New Testament it is a hapax legomenon meaning that it occurs only here and nowhere else.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was completed long before Jesus was born, we find the word only 3 times used in this sense. The second of the three is Ezekiel 21:31 where God declares, “I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow (ἐμφυσάω) on you with the fire of My wrath” Of course the Holy Spirit is also associated with the Fire of God.



The first place we see the word in the Bible is Genesis 2:7. John has once again and for the final time drawn our attention back to the creation account. There it says, “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed (ἐμφυσάω, so blew His breath) into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person.”

The thing Jesus was doing was recreating man blowing new life into what was actually dead and had only seemed alive before. Jesus blew His breath into His disciples, and they became truly living persons.



To put a nice bow on it we find the final occurrence of the word in Ezekiel 37:9&10, ‘Then God said to me, “Prophecy to the breath (πνεῦμα), prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath (πνεῦμα), ‘The Lord God says this: “Come from the four winds (πνεῦμα), breath (πνεῦμα), and breathe (ἐμφυσάω) on these slain, so that they come to life.” ’ ” 10So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath (πνεῦμα) entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.



The next thing we should discuss is the fact that Jesus, as He blew on them, commanded them to “Receive the Holy Spirit.” A moment ago, I said “Jesus blew His breath into His disciples, and they became truly living persons.” The word into is important because technically Jesus blew upon them, not specifically into their nostrils.

A command implies choice. Adam had no choice in the matter of God blowing life into him, but everyone gets a choice about whether they want to continue in death or to be reborn by taking Christ’s breath into themselves.

We all, from the disciples in that room on the very first Easter Sunday to all of us in this room on this Sunday choose whether we will take the breath of life from Jesus into ourselves or not.

Notice that bracketing this bestowal of new and eternal life is a commissioning. He said, “just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” and “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

Commissioning into ministry service is woven within the fabric of Salvation itself. They rejoiced at seeing Jesus as the Lamb or God Who has now already taken away the sins of the world. That’s a deeper and more accurate belief in Him. So, Jesus reiterated that they had received peace because of Him. Then He sent them just as He was sent, and He blew on them the Breath of Life and commanded them to take that Life in the Spirit into themselves – to embrace Life in Him. Then He went on to say that the forgiveness of sins rested with them – rested with the church.



Does that mean the Catholics were right all along? We'll get to that, but first please see that being part of the family of God is being actively involved as a family member – doing what the family does. The family the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are all actively involved in the family business of Saving human beings from eternal death.

Honestly, you are not “being” a family member if you are not “being” a family member. The Father wanted to save people and so He sent the Son. The Son provided Salvation and He sent the Spirit. The Spirit is here to work through the church to lead people to Jesus and from Jesus to the Father and into the family.

For many centuries Christians have struggled with the disconnect between being a Spirit Filled Born Again Christ Follower and actually acting like it. Many people have tried many things to close that gap. Everything from shunning the world to striving for a second Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in other tongues. None have produced more Christ-like people. Oftentimes quite the contrary.

I think the reason that we are so unchanged, so unaffected, so unaltered by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us is our general refusal to participate in, and live out, our life in the Spirit. We have convinced ourselves that the Holy Spirit is a commodity that we use to improve our life.

We act like we were given the Holy Spirit so we could understand the Bible, so we could be nicer people, so we could have some power to do things like speaking in tongues, or healing people, or uttering prophetic words. It seems like the Holy Spirit is just another vitamin regimen, or holistic treatment, or exercise routine, to help us be our best self.

How could the Holy Spirit make us more Christ-like when we refuse to allow Him to mold us into what Christ is because we refuse to do what Christ does? Jesus saves. The Holy Spirit is God.

Look we've hit this from several angles today. The simple fact is that God's plan of Salvation encompasses a new life in Christ. We get that. This new life is supposed to conform to the life of Jesus Himself. We get that. The life of Jesus was entirely focused on creating opportunities for human beings to be reborn. That was His mission and purpose and if we are to be like Him it must be our mission and purpose as well.

God is a Missionary. The Father at terrible cost chose to send the Word of God to planet earth as a Missionary. The Father and the Son together chose to send the other Paraclete, the Breath of God, the Holy Spirit, to earth, into you and me, as a Missionary. What do you suppose we are to do? Here Jesus sent us, His disciples into the world as missionaries.



That brings us to the verse on forgiveness. 23If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

There’s some technical grammatical stuff going on here that I could bore you with or we can look carefully at how the translators tried to convey it, by paying attention to verb tenses and the little helping words. Notice the changes, “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them.” In the first phrase it’s conditional, “If.” Then “you” is plural, y’all, in other words the church – meaning the Body of Christ on

earth – “where two or more are gathered” in His Holy name.

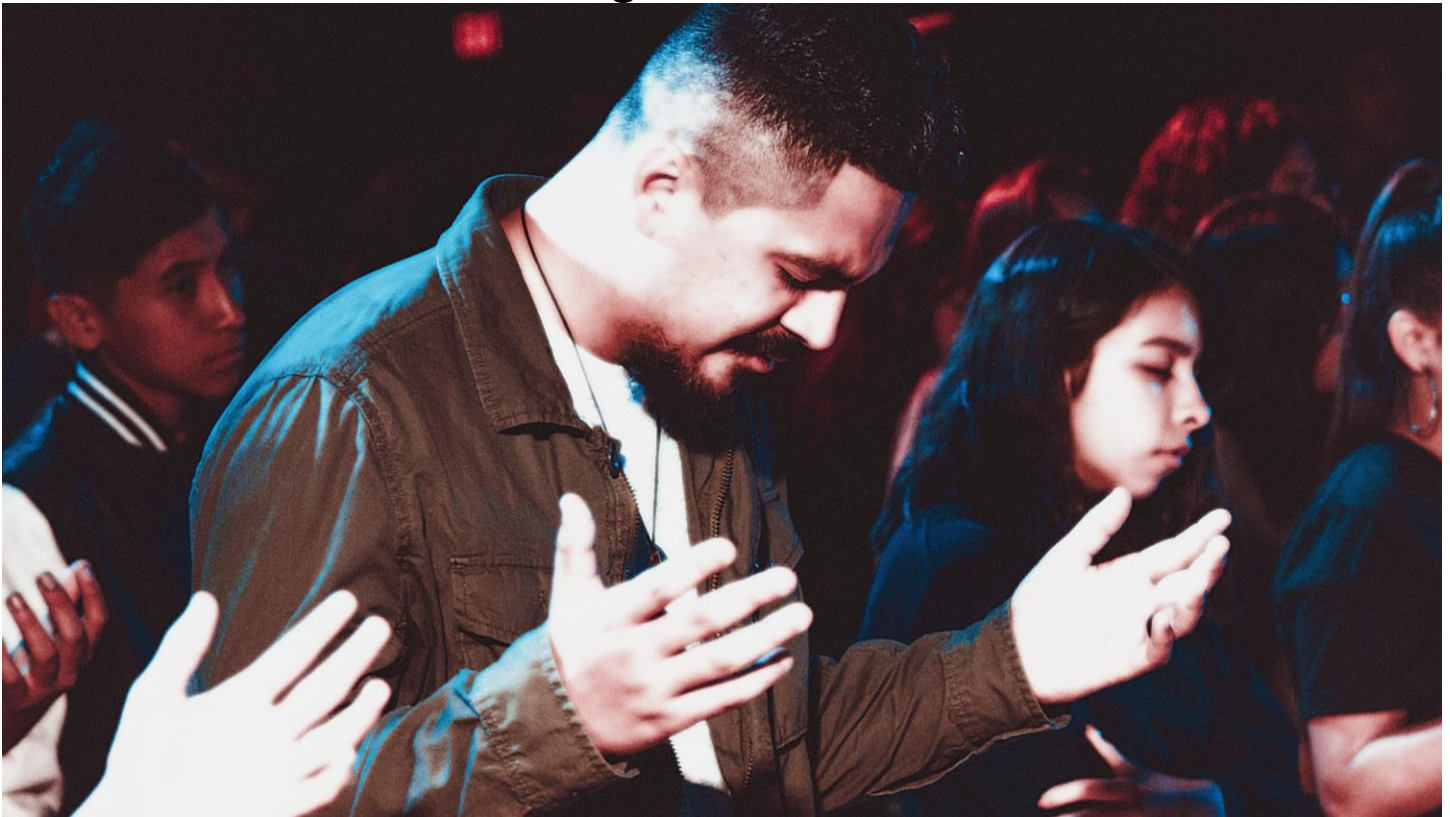


If the church forgives the sins of any person... then the second phrase says that that person’s sins have already been forgiven and that the forgiveness that was already received in the past was received passively. What does that mean? It means that when the church forgives anyone the church that now includes that new forgiven person come to find out that God has already forgiven them. Their forgiveness is past tense, and it is passive, meaning that the final forgiving that was already accomplished was done by God.

I know it's a little difficult so just relax I'm going to take another stab or two at it. What happens is that the church is able to uncover what God has already done. This is the same type of thing as the binding and loosing we see a couple of times in Matthew's Gospel. It's about Christians acting in accordance with the Holy Spirit within them and through those actions discovering what God has already accomplished.

It will be helpful to look at one of those passages. I'll read a bit extra for context, but as I read it realize that the principle can be applied to more than the specific situation addressed by Jesus... Matthew 18:15–20, 15 "If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. 17 If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

20For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.”



Now, we could spend a lot of time fully explaining the phenomenon but let me get down to the practical application. The Matthew context is church unity. The context of our verse in John is Salvation. When you, as a member of the Body of Christ, allow the Holy Spirit to minister God's grace to others around you they react and, in some cases, they react positively and are Saved. You then declare to them as a newly Saved and Holy Spirit filled Christ follower that their sins have been forgiven. God says you're correct, I've already forgiven that person.

It's also true that in other cases they react poorly and are not saved therefore you declare that they are not forgiven by God and God says, you are correct again, I have not forgiven them. The person's sins have been retained by them and so by you in acknowledging their decision and you discover that God never forgave that person. In that case, we won't really know whether that is a situation that they might change in the future or not.

The key to this concept is that when we, the disciples of Jesus as His Body on earth, work in the family business, we are able to see people Saved and we are able to recognize and declare that fact, and then we are able to see that God was already there long beforehand.



Bottom line, if you want to act like a Christian you need to recognize that a Christian follows Jesus as a missionary doing what the Holy Spirit gifts them to do in building the Kingdom of God one person at a time. That's how the commission to minister is tied to forgiving.

Will you share Christ with the people in your world? I'm not asking – Jesus is asking you through me. Will you share Christ with those God has put in your path? What's at stake is the forgiveness of sins. What's at stake is a fellow human being's eternal life or death.