

A Willing Heart by Tricia Berg

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also. 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

God doesn't forcefully take anything from us in this age of grace. That would be fake worship, and He is not interested in it. That would be totally against His nature. He is perfect in truth, wisdom and love, with absolute power. If He wanted robots, He would have made them, but He didn't. We can each choose whether to believe when we hear the Good News of how He loved the world enough to send His beloved, only begotten Son to die for our sins, and we can choose whether to obey, out of genuine love for Him. If we truly know Him, then the natural response is to love Him. No one could ever convince me of any other possible outcome. So in other words, anyone who does not love God (and thus obey the God they claim to believe in) has a lack of knowledge. They are NOT wise. For those of us who DO love God, our offerings include not only money, but our time, talents, efforts, devotion and pretty much all that we are or ever will be. (Rom. 12:1-2, Heb. 13:15-16)

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of **wisdom**; all those who **practice** it have a good **understanding**. His praise endures forever! Psalm 111:10*

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their **whole heart**, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! Psalm 119:1-3*

*Then the people rejoiced because they had given **willingly**, for with a **whole heart** they had **offered freely** to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly. 1 Chronicles 29:9*

*I know, my God, that you **test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness**. In the uprightness of my heart I have **freely offered** all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, **offering freely and joyously** to you. 1 Chronicles 29:17*

*And they came, **everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him**, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a **willing heart** brought brooches and*

earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. All the women **whose hearts stirred them** to use their skill spun the goats' hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, **whose heart moved them** to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a **freewill offering** to the LORD. Exodus 35:21-29

(Note that we sow and reap in all sorts of ways, but the motive in all of it must be love. When we're generous, God blesses us to be a *blessing to others*.)

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready **as a willing gift, not as an exaction**. The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver**. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God**. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 2 Corinthians 9:5-12

At first glance the following passages would seem to support the idea that we are free of all further expectations from God the instant we accept Jesus as our Savior, but we need to view all Scripture in the light of the rest of the Scriptures. Jesus says it costs our LIFE to be His disciple. (Luke 14:33-35, Matt. 10:37-39, Matt. 16:24-27) James says faith without works is dead and that we are under the royal law and the perfect law of liberty, by which we will be judged (as to how we chose to use our freedom to glorify God or not--which is to profane it if we claim to be His but care nothing for His ways). (James

2:8-26, 1Cor. 10:31) John pleads with us to live in such a manner that we will have no need to shrink back in shame from Jesus at His coming and He tells us that whoever loves the world and sin is a liar if they say they even KNOW God, let alone love Him. (1John 1:5-2:6, 1John 2:15-17, 1John 2:28-29) Paul says that we are under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), and also that if we defile our bodies with sexual sin, we are defiling God's own temple! He compares it to joining Christ with a prostitute! (1Cor. 6:12-20, Eph. 5, Col. 3, Rom. 13:8-14)

*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, **being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own**, they did not **submit** to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Romans 10:2-4*

*What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because **they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works**. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." Romans 9:30-33*

No, the point of those passages is not to say we are free TO sin, but that we do NOT earn salvation by our behavior. We obey the spirit of the law out of love for God, out of understanding of who it is that we serve and belong to. (Gal. 1:10, John 12:25-26) That "love" does not include sinning on purpose, encouraging others to do so or approving of it when others sin. (Matt. 18:5-10, 1Thess. 4:1-8) It's better to be "hurt" by the truth now than to suffer forever by hearing what you want to hear now. (1Cor. 5, Mark 9:42-49, James 5:19-20, Jude 1:22-23, Gal. 6:1, Eph. 4:15-32, 2Cor. 7:8-10) "Safe zones" from speech that we might disagree with were designed by Satan to prevent people from hearing the truth that saves. (Rom. 1:18-32, 2Thess. 2:9-12) Our motive is LOVE, not wanting any to perish. (2Pet. 3:9-14, 1Tim. 2:1-6, 1Cor. 13:1-3)

If, as Jesus says, we're to despise even our family if they try to dissuade us from following Jesus, then it goes without saying that we shouldn't go along with friends or even enemies as they live contrary to the values in the Bible. (Luke 14:33-35, Titus 2:11-15, Matt. 10:37-39, Matt. 16:24-26, Mark 8:34-38 Luke 9:23-26) (This does not mean *abandoning* our spouse or dependent children, or failing to *respect* our parents.) When Paul said he was a chameleon amongst those he was trying to reach with the Gospel, he did NOT mean he joined in their sin. Again, context is everything. Paul goes on to discuss

“competing for the prize” according to the rules—exercising self-discipline so as not to be disqualified. If he meant that we should blend in with the world, that would contradict the rest of Scripture, so we know that is NOT what he meant. No, we’re told that bad company corrupts good morals and to be careful not to slip when trying to help someone else up (who has stumbled into sin). (1Cor. 15:33, Gal. 6:1, 2Thess. 3:6, 2John 1:6-11)

*For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So **run that you may obtain it**. Every athlete **exercises self-control in all things**. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But **I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified**. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” **We must not indulge in sexual immorality** as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now **these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come**. Therefore **let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry**. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a*

*participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. **I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?** 1 Corinthians 9:19-10:22*

*If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. **We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.** And we know that **the Son of God has come and has given us understanding**, so that we may know him who is true; and **we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. **Little children, keep yourselves from idols.** 1 John 5:16-21***

The concept of idolatry does not only apply to bowing to statues, kissing religious medallions, and worshiping false gods. Anything that has taken the proper place of the one true God in our lives becomes an idol. Yet people take the word of their favorite celebrities over the Bible and let themselves be swayed from the truth by people they love?! Why do those who live by adages such as “I wasn’t born yesterday” and “if it sounds too good to be true, it is” fall for lies such as “God has changed with the times” and “God is no longer concerned with sin [and that is why Jesus had to die for ours ??]” and “all ‘good’ people go to heaven”?

There is NO OTHER way to salvation except Jesus, and no additions to His finished work are needed or acceptable. Paul said this about those who were being deceived into thinking that circumcision was still necessary, but it applies to all works we do thinking they will save us:

*You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have **fallen away from grace.** Galatians 5:4*

Jesus is the ONLY One who could EVER have saved us and He did ALL that was needed. Salvation is FREE, however, the evidence we have received it is a life

of holiness (righteousness, obedience to God), having repented from the evil sins that separated us from God before Jesus became our Redeemer. (Heb. 13:8, Mal. 3:6, Matt. 3:7-12) We're told that we have nothing in common with unbelievers and not to yoke ourselves with them. The following passage immediately follows the one at the top of this article about responding with our whole hearts to God's message. God wants us to distance ourselves from our old sinful lives, including people who reject His offer of salvation who would try to draw us away from Him—misery loves company!

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore **go out from their midst, and be separate from them**, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

God doesn't want anyone thinking that by doing certain things, they will be able to contribute to their own salvation. Jesus is the ONLY way to be made right with and acceptable to God. (John 14:6, John 3:16-18, 36, 1John 2:23) The point is that we worship in spirit and truth, not according to the letter of the law, NOT according to rote and ritual. If we understand who our God is, how powerful, amazing, glorious and wonderful in every way—how much it cost to redeem us from the power of sin over our lives both in this world and the next, then we won't play games with Him. We won't give Him crumbs of our lives and only seek Him when we need something. Jesus is the pearl of great price to us just as we are to Him!

*And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you **hypocrites**, as it is written, "***This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.***" You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" Mark 7:6-9*

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father **in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. John 4:23*

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and **sells all that he has and buys that field**. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, **on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it**. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." Matthew 13:44-51*

Look at the verse below about "our treasure" in context. These are not random thoughts strung together. Jesus is the light of the world and the word of God is a light for our path and lamp for our feet. (John 8:12, Psa. 119:105) When He refers to the "lamp of the body," He means that what we take in with our eyes will determine where we go with our feet (into sin from rejecting or ignoring the Word, or into righteousness from seeking and treasuring it). There is a link between LOVING God and OBEYING God. (John 14:15-24) He doesn't NEED anything from us. Everything we have comes from Him in the first place. (Psa. 24:1, 1Chron. 29:14) He gave us free will to choose because He wants our willing HEARTS. He is love. (1John 4:16) How we respond to all that He is, has done and continually does, is everything.

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Matthew 6:19-24*

Here's another passage to view in context. Notice in the last parable of the series, Jesus makes it perfectly clear that not everyone enters the kingdom. We know from other passages that the kingdom is within us (Luke 17:20-21) and we can't see it without being born again. How are we born again? By having our spirit regenerated by the Holy Spirit. He lives in us and that is why the kingdom of God is within us—that is why you can't see who is born again, but like the wind, you can see the EFFECTS of it (or not, if He is not present or the believer

is grieving and quenching Him from helping them walk as they should). (Rom. 8:18-19, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) The effects of the Spirit are called fruits. (Gal. 5:16-26)

*Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' **The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**"*
John 3:3-8

This doesn't mean there will be no literal kingdom, but it does mean that only those who are baptized INTO Jesus by the Spirit will enter. The water is symbolic of the "drowning" of our old self. We rise out of the water into His resurrection, a new, clean creation in Christ. (Rom. 6:3-11, John 14:15-24, 1Pet. 3:21-22 - water cannot give you a clear conscience toward God.) "The flesh profits nothing" applies to ALL of our works, including water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those commemorate the work the Spirit has already DONE in regenerating a believer at the moment when they put their full trust in the shed blood of Jesus to wash their sins away. (Acts 10:44-48, Rev. 1:5, 7:14, Heb. 9:14, 1John 1:7) We do them because we were commanded as BELIEVERS to observe them as ordinances, not in order to contribute to our salvation. (John 6:63, Luke 22:19, Titus 3:5, Matt. 28:19-20)

This kingdom within us is what was taken from Israel and given to a people who would produce its fruits. The Church (comprised of believing Gentiles and Jews in this age) has the firstfruits of the Spirit, which means there will be more "harvested" after it. (Rom. 8:23, 1Cor. 15:23, James 1:18, Rev. 14:14-16) Jesus was the "firstborn of the dead," meaning there will be more resurrected after Him. (Col. 1:18, Rev. 1:5, Rev. 14:4-5) It doesn't mean God is finished with Israel forever. (Matt. 21:42-44, Isa. 54, Jer. 33:19-26, Hosea 6:1-2, 11) They will also enter the New Covenant. (Rom. 11:19-24, Heb. 4) They WILL say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" some day. (Matt. 23:39)

We must overcome by faith, abiding IN Jesus and He in us. (John 15, Rev. 21:7, Rev. 22:10-15) People who consider the trash of this world more valuable than treasure in heaven, who think that earthly pleasures are more desirable than pleasing God, who seek to serve themselves even when it dishonors God and

profanes His holy name that they call themselves by, will REGRET it. (2Tim. 2:19, Heb. 12:14-17) Some may find they never had a saving faith to begin with and are lost eternally, and others may lose reward. (1Cor. 3:11-15, Matt. 24:45-51, Rev. 22:15) Should we be "coveting" rewards in the next life? In a way, yes (but not that we don't want others to have them, or wish we had theirs). Jesus told us to store treasure in heaven. (Matt. 6:1-21, Matt. 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22) These rewards will be the result of the glory and honor we brought Him in this life. (2John 1:8, Heb. 10:36, James 1:12) They will show how faithful we were to Him, and it will give Him great pleasure to award them. We don't need wait to see how worthy He is with our eyes (when it will be too late to give more of ourselves), we have all we need in order to come to that conclusion now, in the Bible.

Jesus is explaining below that He cleanses us with the pure water of the Word, which is what happens when we believe the Gospel—accept by faith that the blood He shed for us on the cross will wash away our sins. (Heb. 9:22, Titus 3:4-8, Eph. 5:25-27, Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:19-20, Heb. 13:12-17, 1John 1:5-10, 1Pet. 1:23) At NO POINT does He say that if we run off like the prodigal son and wallow in the mud like a pig and FAIL TO RETURN to Him in repentance, which means "turn from," that we are STILL clean (remember, the prodigal son came back to his father of his own accord). (2Pet. 2:1-3, 17-22, Rev. 3:4, Rev. 16:15) We need to ABIDE in Jesus. He is returning for those who are IN Him (John 14:2-3, 1Thess. 4:16-18, 1Cor. 15:23, Rom. 8:9)—not those who once pretended to believe but showed by their evil deeds that they were not being genuine, and not those who think that by doing enough good deeds, they won't need Jesus or that they will somehow add to what He did on the cross. Neither of those extreme opposite beliefs represents true, saving faith.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. John 13:6-11

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told

you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? **You have the words of eternal life**, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:63-69

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away**, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. **You are my friends if you do what I command you.**" John 15:1-14

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "**The Lord knows those who are his,**" and, "**Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.**" Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, **if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.** Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And **the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape**

from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.
2 Timothy 2:19-26

What will be your choice? Will you be like Joshua and Caleb, who entered the promised land (which was a foreshadow of the kingdom of God) due to their whole-hearted faithfulness, or like Solomon who eventually (and probably gradually) let his wives turn his heart away from God so that after his death, out of respect for his faithful father David, the kingdom was divided? (Num. 32:11-12, 1Kings 11:4) Will you treasure in your heart the absolute MIRACLE that God would want to make you His own and reside IN you, or will you treat the gift you have received as common like Esau did with his birthright of the firstborn? (Heb. 12:14-16, Heb. 10:29, Heb. 6:4-12)

As you may know, Isaac was a "type" of Jesus. Abraham was told to go and sacrifice his only son, whom he loved (Gen. 22:2), but God was testing his faithfulness and Isaac was spared. (Gen. 22:12). (No one was ever tested in that way again.) Abraham became our "father" through his faithfulness. (Gen. 22:15-18, Rom. 4, Rom. 9:6-8, Gal. 3:16-18, Rom. 2:28-29) (Note there clearly still ARE genders, the point of the following passage is that we all receive the same salvation in Christ. Whoever uses this in support of today's sad issue of gender confusion is gravely misled. God made what He made the way He wanted, for the purpose He wanted. Gen. 1:27-28 Rebellion against God is nothing new, though. Gen. 3:4, Rom. 1:24-28)

*For as many of you as were baptized **into** Christ have put **on** Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.** Galatians 3:27-29*

Later, Abraham's servant was sent to obtain a wife for Isaac. (I would recommend reading the entire chapter of Genesis 24, as it is a beautiful story.) It is interesting how the servant bestowed some gifts on Rebecca upon realizing that the signs he requested that she was "the one" were shown (perhaps like we receive the "deposit" of the Holy Spirit when we believe) and more gifts upon her agreement to marry the servant's master (like we receive gifts of the Spirit to use for the glory of God's kingdom). The servant spoke to Rebecca's father and brother when asking that she be allowed to accompany him to marry his master in this way:

*Now then, **if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me**, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." Genesis 24:49*

Her family wanted her to stay with them for a while before departing, but she was willing to go right away the next morning. (Gen. 24:55-58) She didn't just say she would follow or dally around after making the commitment, she WENT. (Luke 9:59-62, John 12:26) Speaking of morning, another "type" of Jesus was Boaz, who married Ruth. She remained with Boaz at the threshing floor until morning (Ruth 3:8-14), when Boaz redeemed both her personally (by marrying her at what appears to be the end of the barley harvest - Ruth 4:13, Ruth 3:2) and at the same time, he redeemed her mother-in-law Naomi's land. (Ruth 4:9, Matt. 13:45-46, Acts 20:28, 1Cor. 6:19-20, Rev. 5:9)

The kingdom of God is often compared to a crop of grain (Matt. 9:37-38) Jesus was the firstfruits of barley—we know this because He fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits of barley (Lev.23:9-14, 1Cor. 15:20) The counting of the omer (for 50 days) is completed on Pentecost (which is also called "firstfruits" or Feast of Weeks, when the firstfruits of wheat is offered—"new" grain—it is not possible to have "firstfruits" again of the same crop in the same year). (Ex. 34:22, Lev. 23:15-22, Num. 28:26-31)

Boaz previously praised Ruth (who was a Gentile who had come to faith in the one, true God of Israel, just like us - Ruth 1:16-17 - and who had left her home behind like Rebecca) in this way:

*But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. **The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!**" Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants." Ruth 2:11-13*

In Psalm 45, the groom represents Jesus. (We are told this by Paul who quotes from it and says it refers to "the Son." Psa. 45:7-6, Heb. 1:8-9) She is told to forget her family (whom she has left behind to go and marry, like Rebecca and Ruth). To anyone whose family says that "God has no son" or that Jesus was only "a son" of God (Prov. 30:4, John 1:18, 1John 4:9-10) or that Jesus' mother still manages His affairs for Him as though He were a child, you need to think for yourself! (2Cor. 5:16, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 11:27-28) Don't be deceived! Don't rely on traditions of men, no matter how long they've been practiced or by how many. (Matt. 23, Mark 7:1-23) If your religion relies on ANY other book than the Bible, or elevates tradition to the level of Scripture even though there are contradictions between the two, then you have a serious problem! And if

you recognize that others are deceived and yet think that you have given all God desired of you by attending "church" (which is not a building or institution) once a week, you are also deceived. He wants your WHOLE heart! (This is not to say we shouldn't gather together, but that we should also live our lives at all times in such a way that reflects who we are as children of God.)

Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him. Psalm 45:10-11

God is looking for FAITHFUL, DEVOTED servants who despise the evil in this world the same way He does (Mal. 3:13-4:3, Prov. 6:16-22)—people who don't want to go back to their "old country" (Heb. 11:15-16, Ruth 1:18) and are not easily swayed and distracted, people who will not desert Him the moment things get rough. (Matt. 13:18-23) Believe me, times ARE going to get rough, especially for those who refuse to go along with Satan's agenda. (John 15:18-21, 2Tim. 3:12-13, Luke 12:11-12, Rev. 13:7-10, 14:9-13) We need to be READY to withstand whatever happens. (Heb. 12:3-14) We need to put on the full armor of God and be found faithfully serving our Lord when He returns for us. (Eph. 6:10-20, 1Sam. 14:6-7, 2Tim. 2:3-7, 11-12, Rev. 22:12) He IS our Lord, right? Or does anyone think they can just say some empty words and God can't see inside their heart or observe their contradictory behavior? (Rom. 10:9-10) It's NOT enough to just CALL Him Lord—that will not fool Him. (Matt. 7:21, Luke 6:46)

Let me tell you this: Those who are born again are indwelt by God's own Spirit and they ARE able to resist temptation to sin—they are able to desire to know and do God's will. (Philip. 2:12-16) He doesn't "understand" why they "can't" stop sinning, because they CAN. He will forgive ANY and ALL slips, but it's not possible to repent of sins we are deliberately continuing in. That is mocking God. We bear fruit because we have a new nature inside of us. (Gal. 6:7-8, 2Pet. 1:9, Romans 6, 2Cor. 5:17) Jesus explained in the parable of the sower that some would not persevere and continue following Him. He also warned about counting the cost. Salt that has lost its saltiness is useless. That is what a person who promised to follow Jesus and then turned back is like. (Luke 14:25-35, Luke 9:62) Whoever accepts what false teachers tell them to tickle their ears is only harming themselves. (2Tim. 4:3-4)

*"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and **does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and*

*immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and **when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.** As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but **the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.** As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who **hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit** and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:18-23*

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who **pervert the grace of our God into sensuality** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:3-4*

The second part of the following passage is often quoted by people who like to imagine that their life as a Christian is supposed to be comfortable and easy. However, the context shows that this refers to standing up for Jesus no matter what. We are not to fear death or anything in this life, because we know that we will be with Jesus forever. (Psa. 116:15, 1Thess. 4:17-18) That's ALL that really matters. Our bodies are mere tents that we live in while away from our true home. (Heb. 10:34, Philip. 3:17-21, 2Pet. 1:3-15, 2Cor. 5:6-10) Whoever has not “put on Christ” will be found NAKED when they stand before God. If we have been clothed and cleansed, let's strive to stay that way and live to please God so that people who are observing us will get a true picture of what it is to belong to Jesus. (1Pet. 2:11-12, 1Pet. 4:1-5, Titus 2:7-8, Matt. 5:16) Let's remain steadfast under fire so that He will say to us "well done, good and faithful servant" when He returns to save us from God's wrath and reward us. (Matt. 24:45-51, Heb. 9:27-28, Rev. 11:15-18, Rev. 22:12-20)

*“So **do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.** What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. **Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:26-31*

For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. Romans 14:8

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.** For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and **we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.** 2 Corinthians 5:1-10*

I must point out that the following passage is NOT about the Jews rejecting Jesus. This is written to believers who "were sanctified." The warning is to STOP sinning on purpose! When we didn't know better, that was understandable, but now we are born again and we DO know better. (Acts 17:30-31, Rom. 3:23-26, 1Tim. 1:12-13, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2, 5, Eph. 4:17-32) This is not to say there is no forgiveness for sins committed after coming to faith. (1John 1:9, Heb. 7:25) The point is that we don't continue living in sin now that we're free from its hold on us and our old sinful self was crucified with Christ. (Rom. 6, Gal. 2:20)

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth**, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the*

one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has **profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?** For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. **But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.** For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But **we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.** Hebrews 10:19-39

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! **Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.**" John 5:14

Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and **from now on sin no more.**" John 8:10-11

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." **Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.** 1 Corinthians 15:33-34

Throughout each day and night, we should be asking ourselves if we would be ashamed to be doing whatever we're doing if Jesus were standing right there, watching and listening. He's actually CLOSER than NEXT to us. He's IN us and there is NOTHING that He doesn't know. (Heb. 4:12-13, Rev. 2:23) He is a true, fair judge. (Matt. 22:16, Mark 12:14, Luke 20:21, John 7:24, John 8:16, Acts 17:30-31, 2Tim. 4:8, Rev. 16:7, Rev. 19:11) He knows exactly how much strength He gave us to avoid temptation and what we did with it. (1Cor. 10:13) We are free to live life abundantly—when we try to do so, always putting God first and doing as we feel He would have us to do in light of an HONEST reading of the Scriptures (the WHOLE counsel of God - Acts 20:26-33, 2Tim. 3:16-17 - not little "feel good" snippets out of context), we have nothing to fear. (John 10:10, 1John 4:18, Rom. 14:22-23, James 4:17) If we listen to and follow the example of the unsaved, lost world's twisted interpretation of Scripture, then

we have no one to blame but ourselves. We need to each examine OURSELVES to see if we are "in the faith" or if we're deceiving ourselves. (2Cor. 13:5, Rom. 16:17-19, 1Cor. 6:9-20, 1Cor. 15:33, 2Cor. 11:1-4, Eph. 5:3-21, 1Cor. 4:4-5, 2Tim. 3:12-17, James 1:12-16, 1John 2:24-29, 1John 3:4-10, 2John 1:6-11) Don't be one of those to whom Jesus says "I don't know you" or "I never knew you" or "I don't know where you come from." (Matt. 25:12, Matt. 7:23, Luke 13:25-27)

People who want to continue in their sins and yet claim to be perpetually "washed clean" like to say that God's ONLY concern is that we accept Jesus as Savior. How does that explain, then, the rest of the Scriptures exhorting us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Eph. 4:1-3, Philip. 1:27-30, Col. 1:9-14, 1Thess. 2:10-12, 1John 2:6) Why also would we be the "house" Jesus is faithful over IF we hold fast, and why should we imitate "those who inherit the promises" and hold fast so that we will "receive the promise"? (Heb. 6:11-12, Heb. 13:7-9) And why then is "commandments" plural in the last sentence below? (Luke 6:46-49, 2Cor. 5:15) The fear we are to have of God is a healthy respect for His awesome power. Nothing is impossible for Him! He is holy and we are to be holy as well, out of love, reverence, loyalty and common sense. (1Pet. 1:14-19)

*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, **let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. **Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.**** 1 John 3:13-24*

*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may **grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.** As*

you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** 1 Peter 2:1-5

Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And **we are his house if indeed we hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Hebrews 3:5-6

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be **blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights** in the world, **holding fast to the word of life**, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:12-16

But **be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But **the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.** James 1:22-25

We believers in this age are grafted into Israel. (Rom. 11, 1Pet. 2:9-10, Rom. 10:19-20) We are not under the ritual law, which was a foreshadow of the fulfillment in Christ, by Him. (Matt. 5:17, Col. 2:16-17, Heb. 10:1) However, God still expects obedience. (Matt. 5:18-48, Eph. 5, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2, Luke 6:43-49) When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are entering into the New Covenant—it's like a marriage meant to last forever. If a husband and wife don't give one another their whole hearts, the marriage will suffer. (2Cor. 3:3-6, 1Cor. 11:23-32, Matt. 19:3-9, Eph. 5:22-33, 1Cor. 6:15-20, Rev. 19:7-8) Moses commanded Israel to obey God (as they previously promised to do - Ex. 19:8, 24:3, Deu. 5:27) below:

"This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them **with all your heart and with all your soul.** You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. And the LORD has declared today that

*you are a people **for his treasured possession**, as he has promised you, and that you are to **keep all his commandments**, and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people **holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.**" Deuteronomy 26:16-19 (Also Mark 12:28-34)*

However, they refused to go into the promised land out of fear and lack of trust in God despite all of the wonders and miracles He showed them when He brought them out of Israel. So they wandered in the desert 40 years until all of that generation except faithful Joshua and Caleb died. (Num. 32:13) Those Jews who are "hardened of heart" and "partially blinded" today, still rejecting Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:5-8, Heb. 4) the ONLY one who can give us rest, are "wandering in the wilderness" for these past almost 2,000 years, which amounts to 40 years of jubilees - $50 \times 40 = 2,000$. (The jubilees represent freedom. Lev. 25) However, this time they do not have any manna, as they have rejected the Bread of Life. (John 6:29-36) Here Joshua reiterates what Moses said just before they (finally) enter the promised land:

*"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, **to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.**" Joshua 22:5*

*And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us **we will do**, and **wherever you send us we will go.**" Joshua 1:16*

The church has not "become" Israel nor was it "always" Israel. We are partaking of their blessings, which is a mystery of the ages that God had planned all along. (Rom. 9:4-5, Rom. 11:11-12, Eph. 1:3-14, Eph. 3:1-14, Eph. 5:32, Col. 1:24-28) John the Baptist said he was the friend of the bridegroom (not the bridegroom OR "bride"—which is an entity made of souls regardless of gender). (John 3:29) Jesus said the least in the kingdom of God was greater even than John the Baptist, who was the greatest of those born of women. (Matt. 11:11) This is because when we genuinely believe, we are spiritually born of GOD (born again)—we are sealed with His Spirit and adopted as sons. (John 1:12-13, Rom. 8:15, 23, 2Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13-14, Gal. 4:4-7) This is an INCREDIBLE privilege that should be viewed as such and held VERY dear.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the

heavenly places, even as he **chose us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for **adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ, **according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he **lavished** upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the **mystery of his will**, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **In him we have obtained an inheritance**, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the **first to hope in Christ** might be to the praise of his glory. **In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has **called** you, what are **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe**, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and **gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:1-23

See what kind of love the Father has **lavished** on us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are **God's children** now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that **when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is**. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3

We have nothing to be proud of—this is ALL God's doing in order to make unfaithful Israel jealous. (Rom. 11:13-24) We have received mercy due to their disobedience and they will again receive mercy when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. (Rom. 11:25-36) So this is a limited time offer and whoever is wise

will take it seriously, not striving against God or playing games with Him. We have received the right to become children of God by believing. (John 1:11-13) If our faith is real, the Holy Spirit gives us power to overcome the world and our former nature that was enslaved to sin. (1John 4:4-6) This is how we are born again and enter the kingdom. This is how we overcome.

*And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins in which you **once** walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience**—among whom we all **once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind**, and were **by nature children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were **dead** in our trespasses, made us **alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us **in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** For we are **his workmanship**, created **in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** Ephesians 2:1-10*

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, **who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but **if by the Spirit you put to death the***

deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.** Romans 8:1-17

There is no condemnation for those IN Christ. This is why Jesus said to ABIDE in Him, because there is no hope for us to bear fruit any other way. (John 15) He doesn't "lose" any, but it's our duty to REMAIN in Him by submitting to the influence, guidance, teaching, correcting, convicting of His Spirit. (John 14:26, John 15:4-10, John 15:26, 16:7-8, 1Thess. 5:16-22, Eph. 4:17-32, John 6:63, Rom. 8:10, 1Thess. 4:7-8, 2Tim. 1:7-8, 1John 3:24) Whenever the Bible says "submit to God," that is what it means to us. Walk in the Spirit. (Rom. 8:5-9, Gal. 5:16-18, 24-25) Our God is ONE: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (John 14:10, 20, John 16:13-15, John 17:20-23, Acts 5:3-4, Col. 1:15-20, Col. 2:9-10) If we obey the Father, Son or Spirit, we are obeying the one true God.

We are constantly told in the Bible to "hold fast," "run the race with endurance," "fight the good fight of faith," "stand firm," "persevere," "be on guard," "overcome" and so forth. (Rom. 12:9, 1Cor. 15:1-2, 1Thess. 5:19-22, 2Thess. 2:15, 2Tim. 1:13-14, 1Cor. 9:24-27, Heb. 10:35-36, 1Tim. 6:11-12, Luke 21:19, 1Cor. 15:58, 1Cor. 16:13-14, Eph. 6:13, Philip. 1:27-30, Philip. 4:1, Col. 4:12, 1Thess. 3:8, 2Thess. 2:13-15, James 1:12-16, James 5:7-9, 1Tim. 6:17-21, 2Tim. 1:14, 1John 5:21, Rev. 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21, 21:7) This isn't "works" (such as good deeds to try to earn salvation), but fruits of the Spirit who indwells us and gives us the victory if we will just yield to Him. This is proving our faith is GENUINE. The gate is NARROW—pay attention to the context of that passage. We can't fit anything through it that God in His infinite love and wisdom has chosen to prune off of us. (Matt. 7:13-27, John 15:1-6, 10)

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that **suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.** And hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.** Romans 5:1-5*

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, **be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. **There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.** 2 Peter 3:14-18

Strive for peace with everyone, **and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.** See to it that no one **fails to obtain the grace of God;** that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled;** that no one is **sexually immoral or unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:14-29

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. **In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.** Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. **Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;** for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:3-25

God wants our WHOLE hearts. He deserves nothing less. Let's not live in such a way as to be ashamed when we stand before Him, having no excuse as to why we valued worthless, temporary things more than Him and His kingdom.

We have no excuse because in the New Covenant, Christ is IN each of us who are true believers (whereas in the Old Testament, only a select few received the Spirit), empowering us to prevail. All we have to do is surrender control to Him. It's not DOING something, it's CEASING to strive against Him. He knows this is hard for us, but He gives us grace when we confess our failures and ask for His forgiveness, cleansing and help to overcome. (Heb. 4:14-16)

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, **the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.** To them God chose to make known **how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery,** which is **Christ in you,** the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, **warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.** For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:24-29*

*You **adulterous** people! Do you not know that **friendship with the world is enmity with God?** Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But **he gives more grace.** Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace **to the humble.**" **Submit yourselves therefore to God.** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. **Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves before the Lord,** and he will exalt you. James 4:4-10*

*But **the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.** And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that **you are doing and will do the things that we command.** May the Lord **direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.** Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.** 2 Thessalonians 3:3-6*

Let's not commit spiritual adultery against the One who gave His life for us. (John 10:15-18, Matt. 20:25-28, Eph. 5:29-32) God has stern words for those who claim His promises under false pretenses.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and **perform your vows** to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." But **to the wicked** God says: "**What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you.** If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. Psalm 50:14-19

Let's encourage one another in our Christian walk rather than going along with the world and maybe even joining them in criticizing those who don't compromise. (Heb. 10:23-25, 2Cor. 13:11, Col. 2:1-8, 1Thess. 4, 1Thess. 5:14-22, 1Tim. 5:1-2, 2Tim. 4:1-5, Titus 1:8-11, Titus 2, Heb. 3:12-13, Heb. 10:24-25, 1Pet. 4:3-5, Rom. 14:4, 10-13, 1John 2:9-11, 1John 3:15, 1John 4:20) Let's love in word AND deed. (1John 3:18)

*In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility toward one another**, because, "**God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.**" **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.** And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, **after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.** To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, **encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.** 1 Peter 5:5-12*



*We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; **our heart is wide open.** You are not restricted by us, but **you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.** 2 Corinthians 6:11-13*

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