

## **AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH ("EQUAL RIGHTS ")**

by Tricia Berg

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27*

Do you ever wonder why "equal rights" are not addressed in the Bible? Is it because times were different then and we know better now? Did God design the order He prescribed with only the ancient times in mind, but He expected us to change it to how it "should be" eventually? The answer is no, He didn't. He designed the structure of the family, which necessarily includes gender and corresponding roles, the way He meant for it to be for all time. It reflects an orderly hierarchy in the manner that He desired. He is not a God of chaos, but of order. Even in His dealings with us, God the Father is above the Son, who is above the Spirit (and yet God is ONE). (*Be sure to read the following passages if disagreement is your initial reaction to the previous statement: John 8:28, 10:18, 12:49, 14:10, John 16:13-15, 1Cor. 15:24-27*)

While it is true that there is no longer male or female when it comes to salvation, that is clearly a spiritual reality, not a physical one. (Gal. 3:28) Men are not "better" or "more important" to God than women. However, He equipped men in different ways than He did women, for a different purpose. Women ARE weaker in their muscles and they ARE more emotional than men. God did that on purpose. (I don't want to hear about exceptions to the rule or how we have ways to compensate for this now, etc. We're talking about God's design, not what the world falling into sin has done to change things.) The woman is the helper of the man and nurturer of the young. (Titus 2) The man is supposed to be the protector, leader and provider of the family. (1Tim. 5) And in the same chapter, we see the Church is to support orphans and true widows as well as poor who are unable to work or have temporarily come on difficult times despite working. Also, the instructions regarding bondservants show what we as servants of God should behave like—all of our work is really for Him. (Col. 3:23) We are not to think ourselves better than others. (Phil. 2:3, Jam. 4:6, 1Pet. 5:6)

God Himself chose to use the man to represent His own strength, leadership, provision and love for us, and the woman to represent the Church's respect,

obedience and devotion to Him. Doing these things God's way (as with all things) will result in healthier, happier families. When both spouses work (especially full-time), weaker families often result due to the struggle and strife, temptation to be unfaithful with co-workers and/or rely on them for support while out working instead of their spouse, no energy to love each other due to stress and weariness, less time and energy for quality time with children, etc. (Prov. 31, Luke 8:3) The more time our children spend under someone else's influence, the more they will absorb that person's (or institution's) values and the more conflicts there might be with our own. When we put God FIRST, He will provide, even when it looks impossible to us. (Matt. 6:25-34, Psa. 37:25) Before saying that it is necessary for both spouses to work, we should examine whether the things we are working for are really required for our health and happiness? In some families, for some periods of time, the answer may be a legitimate yes, but others might be able to make a distinction between what they want and what they actually need, enabling them to make ends meet.

The husband is to lay down his life for his wife if need be, just as Jesus laid down His life for the Church. The woman is to submit to her husband and respect him. Why? Because he spiritually represents Jesus. When she serves her husband, she is really serving the Lord. The way the man treats his wife reflects on Jesus. When believing women revolt against believing men, they are sending a signal to God that they do not accept HIS prescribed order and they are symbolically rejecting the authority of JESUS. When a man mistreats or fails to care for his wife, he is disobeying God. This is a BIG deal.

*Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7*

*But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God*

our Savior. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:1-15

We have much of our knowledge about God's design and intentions for gender roles given in Genesis and then reiterated in the gospels, as well as Paul's writings. (Gen. 1:27-28, 2:18-25, Matt. 19:3-12, 1Cor. 11:1-16, Eph. 5:22-33, 1Cor. 14:33-35, 1Tim. 2:8-15, 1Tim. 5, Titus 1:5-16, 2) Paul received his revelation directly from Jesus Himself. (Acts 20:24, 1Cor. 11:23, 14:37, 1Thess. 4:15) When Paul speaks, it is coming directly from our Lord and King Jesus Christ unless Paul specifically states that it is his own preference (which he does in 1Cor. 7 about whether it is better to remain unmarried BY CHOICE in order to serve God without distracting obligations and whether believers should remain married to unbelievers). Paul's words must be viewed through the lens of the pattern that God is setting as an example of our relationship between genders, as the between the Church and Jesus. There is nothing meant to be degrading or insulting to women in it.

God is God and we are not. He is not going to be taking opinion polls at any point, ever. (Isa. 55:8-9, 29:15-16, 40:13-14, Job 38-41) When women believers want to compete with and dominate men who are believers, they are rebelling against God. When a man who is a believer mistreats a woman, he is not serving God as he should, but is representing Jesus as an abuser rather than a Savior. Jesus LOVES the Church and a man is to love his wife as himself, because they are ONE. Jesus is the head of every man, as well as the Church, and the man is the head of his wife. (Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22) And marriages were meant to be permanent, because they represent God's oneness with us and faithfulness to us forever. (Psa. 100:5, 2Tim. 2:11-13) The two become one when they marry and our Spirit becomes one with Jesus when we are born again and He indwells us. (1Cor. 6:17, Rom. 8:9, Matt. 5:31-32, John 3:3-8)

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot

*or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*  
Ephesians 5:23-33

*Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**: that you **abstain** from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to **control** his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who **do not know God**; that no one transgress and **wrong** his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in **holiness**. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but **God**, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8*

*In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." John 14:20-23*

God teaches us what we need to know about Him through various means, including the way He designed marriage and family, along with their gender roles. (Deut. 22:5, Rom. 1:18-32) When we reject His instruction, we show ourselves to be fools. (1Cor. 1:18-31, 3:18-20) We are really rejecting HIM when we refuse to obey His words. (Luke 10:16, 2Tim. 3:16-17) How can we claim to love Him and look forward to serving Him forever if that is our attitude? We would have a lot less divorce if both male and female believers would follow God's design for marriage—among other things that includes ONE man and ONE wife—no same gender, no playing the field (or living together) before marriage and no adultery. God despises all of those things.

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4*

He desires legitimate offspring, which will not be produced in relationships that go against His design for His children. (1John 1:12-13, Rom. 8:16-23, Phil. 2:12-16, Heb. 12:8, 1John 3:1-10, Mark 10:13-16) When He dwells in us, there should always be fruit of the Spirit. (Matt. 13:23, John 15, Eph. 4, 5, Gal. 5:16-24, Phil. 1:9-11, Heb. 12:11, Jam. 3, 2Pet. 1:3-12) The result will be more people becoming children of God as they hear the Gospel ("good news" of how to be reconciled to our holy God through our Savior) and are drawn to His goodness by our good works in His name. (Eph. 2:10, 1Tim. 6:18-19, Jam. 1:25, 2:14-26, 3:13) Corresponding to the spiritual "fruit," there is meant to be fruit of the womb when a husband joins physically with his wife. (Gen. 1:27-28)

*"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 13:23*

*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. John 15:8-10*

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16*

*And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. Titus 3:14*

*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:12*

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22*

*"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

When there is unfaithfulness in marriage, it doesn't match the example God is using to teach us about His faithfulness to us. (Exo. 34:5-7)

*And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, "Why does He not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did He not make them one, **with a portion of the Spirit in their union**? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." Malachi 2:13-16*

*And Pharisees came up to Him and tested Him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to Him, "If such is the*

*case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it." Matthew 19:3-12*

This relentless attack on the family and godly values has included a push for women's "rights" to dress immodestly and behave promiscuously as well. Any sexual relations outside of marriage (as HE defined it) by BELIEVERS is compared with joining Jesus to a prostitute because they are indwelt by His Spirit and our bodies are His temple. We do know He is HOLY, don't we? This is not a light issue, and compliance with God's way is NOT optional for those who belong to God! (1Pet. 1:14-19, 1Thess. 4:1-8) The "perfect law of liberty" in Christ was never meant to be misused to serve our old, sinful selves. (Jam. 1:25, Rom. 6:1-2, 12-13, 15, 22, Eph. 4, Gal. 5:13, 16, Jude 1:4, 1Pet. 2:16)

*I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 1 Timothy 2:9-10*

*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:14-16*

False teachers are good at twisting Scripture to make it sound like they understand something others don't (and they know that telling people what they want to hear instead of about repentance from sin is more profitable for them). Some of them say that the real way to prove you "trust" God is to do as you please, living like a heathen if that's what you want, fully expecting Him to accept you in your filth despite the fact that He shed His blood to cleanse you, and despite your NOT even being repentant, but fully intending to continue in your sin rather than turn from it. Scripture says Jesus is faithful to forgive and cleanse us IF we confess our sins, not that He loves sins and delights in those who commit them... My advice to those false teachers is to take heed to the "blackest darkness" warning in 2 Peter 2:17. (1John 1:9, Mal. 2:17, 2Pet. 2)

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1*

Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Ephesians 5:1-3

God is great and holy and we are to fear Him—enough to do as He says! He calls that WISDOM, so the opposite would be FOOLISHNESS, wouldn't it? But no one needs to take my word for it—God said it Himself repeatedly in the Bible. (Matt. 7:26, Psa. 14:1, Prov. 3:7, 14:15-16, Job 28:28) We have received a beautiful and precious gift. If we trample on that gift and care nothing at all about its value, then we obviously DO NOT LOVE HIM and His promises made to those who love Him DO NOT apply to us. (Heb. 10:29)

*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. 2 Corinthians 11:1-4*

Anyone who is teaching that we are free TO sin instead of free FROM sin is no friend of God or of any believer. (Matt. 5:19, 1Tim. 6:11) Here is what Jesus and Paul had to say about friends:

"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. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another." John 15:10-17

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

We are under the "law" of love, "slaves" of righteousness, obeying our Savior because our joy is found in Him. Why is it called "freedom" then? Because God knows that most people will only obey out of fear so long as their Lord and Master is present, then they will go back to doing what they normally do, thinking He won't find out. (Luke 19:12-27, Matt. 24:45-51, 25:14-30) But a person who obeys out of LOVE can be trusted to do what is right even when He is away. That's why. Despite the death penalty being a possible outcome (in all states at one time and still in some today), heinous crimes are still committed. Why is that? Because people always think they will get away with it! Our faith is being tested to see if it is genuine while our Savior is away. Do we believe He is who He says He is and that He actually will return? Do we believe He sees what we do and realize He knows our very thoughts? Is He our Lord during tough times as well as the good? (That last one sounds like marriage, doesn't it?) Let's pass the test and show our true colors—may they be pure gold! (Job 23:10, Rev. 3:18-19)

*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. 1 Peter 1:6-9*

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22*

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30*

This message is not about losing salvation or working to keep it. It's about the deceptive lie that it is possible to be truly saved, born again—not just an empty confession of the mouth without sincere involvement of the heart, and yet not love God enough to want to please Him or even care to find out how to do that, despite the infinite magnitude of the gift we've received. Read the letters to the churches as dictated to John by Jesus in Revelation 2-3. Does anything in them remind you of today's believers? For me the answer is yes, and so I am sounding the alarm that we need to heed those warnings! Let's get on our knees and ask for forgiveness and for His help to put Him FIRST and live as we should to please Him. We can't save ourselves, only God can do that. However,

people who think they ARE saved (but their lives show no evidence of saving faith) will no longer seek salvation, will they? Better to know the truth now and seek God's mercy while there's time.

This incredible privilege that we've been given was not the norm for believers in the Old Testament. Then, the temple of God on earth was a physical building. The Spirit of God came upon various people at various times, according to God's purpose for them, but not many were actually indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, they were STILL saved by FAITH as we are. The sacrifices offered repeatedly only made them acceptable to God temporarily, but did not save. It was their obedience to God in FAITH that He is God, trusting Him to accept them if they did as He instructed that saved. Jam. 2:18-26, also see ALL of Hebrews 9 and 11. Jesus is building His Church during this age. The Father has taken of His and given them to His Son. (John 6:37, 17:6, Heb. 2:13) It is called a "mystery." (Col. 1:27, 3:1-4, Eph. 5:32, John 17:26) Don't think lightly of it. Failure to appreciate this PROFOUND miracle that we are privileged to be a part of is UNTHINKABLE! We are cautioned not to be unholy and despise our inheritance like Esau did. He lost his inheritance because of his physical appetites. Take warning from his example! (See all of Hebrews 12.)

*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. Colossians 1:24-27*

*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. 1 Peter 1:10-12*

*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also*

*bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will. Hebrews 2:1-4*

*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. Hebrews 12:15-17*

What has been prepared by God is for those who love Him. (1Cor. 2:9-10, 2Tim. 4:8) They are the ones who OBEY Him. (John 14:15-21) Whoever claims to love God and yet disobeys deliberately, refusing to repent, does NOT love Him. (John 14:24) When we believed on Him as our Savior, we claimed Him as our Lord. (Rom. 10:8-10) We were given free will to choose to enter into the covenant with Him. (Matt. 9:14-17, Luke 22:14-20, 1Cor. 11:23-32, Heb. 9:15) The Last Supper was patterned after betrothal customs at that time in Israel, which were binding as though the wedding had already taken place. Jesus is under no obligation to fulfill covenant promises to people who willfully prove by their actions and attitudes that their vows are worthless—that they have no interest of being worthy of Him—that they are only interested in a one-sided relationship where they are served, not in a mutual relationship with give and take, as there should always be in marriage. Salvation is free, but it costs you your life. Jesus has purchased us with His blood and we belong to Him now—we are one with Him. Our lives should be lived to His glory, not to please our old sinful flesh—the very same flesh and its evil deeds that He saved us from being enslaved to. (Romans 6)

*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. Psalm 50:14-17*

*For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. Psalm 61:5*

*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. John 12:25-26*

*Then Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:24-27*

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what **fruit** were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the **fruit** you get leads to*

*sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:1-23*

*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. Hebrews 10:26-31*

Our "vows" are similar to God as they are in marriage—obedience (of the wife to the husband, like the Church to Jesus), faithfulness, loyalty, honor, allegiance, to love and serve. But no wonder people don't understand these days, with the state that marriage is in. So much unfaithfulness, too many couples enslaved by the cost of the living they think they are entitled to or expected to provide for their families—and how many marriages are wrecked over meddling by in-laws? But God's example is that the two should cleave to each other and have a strong, unified marriage. He considers it spiritual adultery in our relationship with Him when we love anything or anyone above Him because it amounts to idolatry. (Matt. 4:10, 6:21, 22:37) Satan is the "ruler of this world" and if we love the world, then not only are we serving the WRONG master, but we don't even LOVE God. (1John 2:15-17)

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 10:34-39*

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That*

*power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. Ephesians 1:17-2:3*

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.* 1 John 2:15-17

Satan is a liar and has been from the beginning—nothing has changed. (John 8:44, Acts 13:9-10, Eph. 6:11-12, Rev. 12:9) We should not be surprised that the world he is now controlling is depraved—this has been done deliberately in an attack against God and His holiness. (2Cor. 11:14-15) We were repeatedly warned to be on our guard against the attacks of the devil and those who serve him by pretending to be from God. (1Pet. 5:8, 1Tim. 4, 2Tim. 3, 4:1-5, Jer. 23:21-22, Jam. 4:7, 1John 3, 1Tim. 1:3-11) Remember, Jesus is not just any lord—He's OUR Lord and the Lord of ALL, though we don't see Him now. (Col. 2:9-10, Heb. 2:8, Rev. 19:16) Not denying Him or being ashamed of Him or His words would logically mean that we take them to heart—that they mean something to us, right? (John 6:66-68, Luke 6:46-49, Heb. 4:12-13)

*You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied Him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" 3:5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts. "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. Malachi 2:17, 3:5-6*

*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if He did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if He rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own*

*vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.” 2 Peter 2:1-22*

Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us (as the bridegroom customarily did during the betrothal period of that day) and will return to take us to where He is. He cautioned us to be ready when He returns, even if it seems as though He has been delayed. He will not be accepting excuses and He cannot be fooled. Notice in the parables how many think they are ready, but they are not? We need to be careful not to accept snippets of scripture that has been removed from the context or even twisted to fit an agenda. Are the ones telling us what we like hearing (that God loves sin and there is no need to change, or that all roads lead to salvation) getting rich, famous and/or powerful from doing so? That would be a clue for us that they are not sent by God with their message. On the flip side, some seek profit through power by clinging to and trying to enforce rituals that were old covenant foreshadows of the new covenant: Titus 1:11; examples of seeking financial profit: 2Cor. 2:17, 2Pet. 2:15 (Balaam’s wages of wickedness), Jude 1:11, *But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. Revelation 2:14)*

*In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. John 14:2-3*

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18*

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:50-53*

*"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:1-13*

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13*

*"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Matthew 7:13-27*

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 2 Peter 3:1-12*

*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. Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. Jude 1:3-8*

The following long passage is written about Jerusalem, but notice how it applies to our situation today as well with the way false teachers tell "Christians" what

they want to hear. It even says understanding will be clear in the last days. *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:4 (Also see 2Tim. 3:16.)*

*But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.” Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear His word, or who has paid attention to His word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart. **In the latter days you will understand it clearly.** “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make My people forget My name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot My name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has My word speak My word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. Is not My word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal My words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, ‘declares the LORD.’ Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did*

*not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD. Jeremiah 23:14-32*

There certainly is a recurring theme of sexual immorality being condemned, isn't there? These days, false teachers have claimed that the only reason Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed was due to inhospitality and related matters. That is not so. A plain reading reveals the truth. It is true that Ezek. 16:49-50 says they were haughty and refused to help the poor. However, it also says they committed abominations before God. (Lev. 18:22) Those abominations are spelled out in more detail in the MANY other passages condemning their behavior. Don't forget, God designed the human bodies as male and female with a purpose in mind as we have already discussed above. People are born one or the other (except in rare instances of defects caused by the fall of the world into sin). Claiming that this isn't the case is rebellious and deceitful. Trying to "remedy" the situation of gender "mistakes" through drugs and surgery is nothing short of an attempt to play God, and God never intended for us to "evolve" into a unisex "gender" with no differences between the two.

Personally, I think that a possible reason many modern-day situations are not specifically mentioned (even though we do have enough information and revelation from His word and Spirit to know His will) is that the time left is very short. (Dan. 12:4) We certainly can see around us that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah being repeated today, and we have no excuse whatsoever not to heed the warning of their example. (Gen. 19:1-29, also see 2Pet. 2:4-14 and Jude 1:4-8 above.) Let me just say that God detests pride of any kind, but being proud of sin, even more so. (Isa. 3:9) He will not be rescuing the ungodly from the coming destruction. This applies to all of the sins that people deliberately practice, not only certain sins. The only hope for anyone is to turn to God in TRUE repentance (so in other words, we mustn't continue practicing the sin that has been repented of and forgiven). God is patient, but He is also holy and just. (Rom. 2:4) He has made ONE way to be reconciled to Him and saved. (Luke 5:32, 24:45-47, 1John 5:11-12)

*"Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out; they call for help because of the arm of the mighty. But none says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens?' There they cry out, but He does not answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God does not hear an empty cry, nor does the Almighty regard it. How much less when you say that you do not see Him, that the case is before Him, and you are waiting for him! And now, because His anger does not punish, and He does not take much note*

*of transgression, Job opens his mouth in empty talk; he multiplies words without knowledge.” Job 35:9-16*

*Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD! Psalm 31:23-24*

As hard as it is for us to imagine, Jesus WILL be returning. The people who have set dates for Jesus’ return (and needless to say, been proven wrong) in the past were most certainly sent by Satan to discourage and give people false assurance that there is no need to be concerned about the Lord returning to find His people living in disobedience to His instructions, being unfaithful to Him. We have no need to know any dates—we only need to be ready at all times—then we will have nothing to fear. Being ready involves keeping His commands (which are not burdensome—He summarized them in two. Matt. 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-10\*), and asking for His forgiveness when we slip. We do this out of LOVE for Him because He SAVED us and we are HIS. He hasn’t left us alone to try to be perfect on our own. (John 14:8) It’s His power within us that helps us, and He will forgive ANY sin that we confess and repent of. (Phil. 2:12-13, 1John 1:9) He intercedes for us and provides a way to escape temptation. (Isa. 53:12, Rom. 8:34, 1Cor. 10:13, Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15, Jam. 1:13-15, 2Pet. 2:9)

\*Please understand, however, that “love” has never included sinning or approving of sin. We are to take care not to sin, to cause or teach anyone else to sin or to fall into temptation when trying to restore a fellow Christian who slipped. (Matt. 18:5-9, Gal. 6:1) (This is a shameful thing to think of in light of what public education is teaching children these days about “tolerance” [in many instances, of sin—homosexuality is NOT a race]. You don’t have to be a bully to speak the truth in love. It is NOT kind to lie to people, telling them there is no God or that He loves sin and everyone goes to heaven.)

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all*

sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:14-32

False teachers have taken it upon themselves to redefine "unnatural relations" in the following passage as being unwelcome advances, unhealthy use of power against someone, abusive behavior, etc. While all of those are indeed undesirable, it is abundantly clear from the text that the term "unnatural relations" refers to relations that go against God's design for male and female unions, through which He also designed humans to reproduce after their kind in a similar way that He did with other living things—through seed (semen, in this case). God did not "make" anyone to be homosexual. The manner in which we sin is not "who we are," it is what we do. God will help anyone who sincerely desires to live to please Him. With every temptation that is allowed in our lives, He provides a way out. (1Cor. 10:13, Heb. 2:18) If a cause is someday found for same sex attraction, we can be sure it will be a result of sin ruining the world—the same as all of the other things that ail us. God made all of His creation VERY good (Gen. 1:31), but we have been using our "freedom" to destroy it in every possible way ever since.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God,

they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:18-32

When someone is willfully unrepentant, they are to be excluded from fellowship, and if they repent, they are to be welcomed back wholeheartedly. The goal is fellowship, not exclusion, and unity, not division, but it must be on God's terms. (2Cor. 6:14-18) He is holy. He hates sin—always has and always will. Jesus would not have had to die for us if God now approves of sin, would He?

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers,*

*or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:1-13*

*And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. 2 Corinthians 2:3-11*

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:1, 7-8*

Do you see how making substitutions in the order of things, including gender roles, family structure and hierarchy of order, according to our own preference or "wisdom" does not reflect God's plan? He doesn't change with the times, or according to OUR will. (Job 28:28, Psa. 111:10, Prov. 1:7) This is not a popular viewpoint these days, but God cautioned us not to take sides against Him. (Mark 8:38, Matt. 12:30, Gal. 1:10) Whoever does not accept God's will and prefers their own is not only failing to be a faithful servant, but they may very well be committing idolatry since they have substituted another "god" (whether themselves or worldly wisdom) for the one true God who revealed Himself to us in the Bible and through His creation.

Furthermore, as we saw above in Romans 1, God will only strive with people for so long and then He will let them go their own way. God emphasizes this point three times (verses 24, 26, 28), where we learn that He gave up unrighteous people who suppress the truth (v. 18) to their own evil desires: lusts of the heart to dishonor their bodies in impurity, dishonorable passions contrary to nature, and a debased mind to do what ought not be done. They didn't acknowledge Him or give Him honor and so He left them to destroy themselves: *They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Romans 1:29-31* We see in verse 32 that they made their sins even worse by approving of others doing them. *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:32* If this doesn't sound alarming, it should—this is where we are in the "evolution" of our society today! (Be sure not to interpret this next passage to mean that every single dream you have has been sent by God, like many wayward "YouTube 'prophets'" do.)

*For God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, He may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride, to preserve them from the pit, their lives from perishing by the sword. Job 33:14-18 (Also see Ezekiel 3:17-21)*

For anyone reading this, there's still time to repent of the sin of rebellion against God and all of those sins that go along with it. Many well-meaning people have been deceived into supporting ungodly agendas as well, but the Bible is very clear and so there is no excuse to remain in ignorance. God is faithful to forgive ANY sin when we believe in Him, but there is no such thing as repenting of a sin that a person is continuing to practice. (1John 1:9, Rev. 22:11) Repent means to "turn" from it.

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put Me to the test and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known My ways.' As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be*

*hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."* Hebrews 3:7-15

*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.* Romans 8:5-9

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing **fruit** in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* Colossians 1:9-14

Jesus' return is sooner now than when the Bible was written. Be ready. (Matt. 24:42-44, 26:41, Luke 12:35-40, Mark 13:32-37, 1Thess. 5:6, Rev. 16:15) None of us knows when our last moment on earth will be, regardless of when Jesus returns. For that reason, we need to examine our own lives to see them through Jesus' eyes. Will the REAL Jesus of the Bible (not a fluffy, edited version of Him) be pleased or will we be in a position of feeling that we need excuses or explanations? We live by FAITH (Rom. 1:17), not in FEAR (1John 4:18), but that doesn't mean we cast all regard for God and His ways to the wind, forgetting who He is and what He's done for us. Saying we're "all sinners" doesn't cut it as an excuse when viewed in light of the indwelling Holy Spirit who HELPS us to do God's will. If we need threats of punishment to motivate us, there is something lacking in our love for God, IF we actually do love Him.

*Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in*

quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Romans 13:11-14

[Jesus:] "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of My God." Revelation 3:2

This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we **lie** and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is **not** in us. 1 John 1:5-10

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

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, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

*I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them—since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God. Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 2 Corinthians 12:21-51*

You have just been served up a hearty, edifying meal. Don't flag down the wait staff and ask them to bring you whipped fluff instead. (1Cor. 3:1-2) Go look up the Bible verses that were not quoted in full. I recommend Biblehub.com, where you can choose various versions, compare and even look up the original Greek and Hebrew. Let's study God's word so we know what He is looking for in a good and faithful servant. (Matt. 25:14-46, 2Tim. 2:15, John 4:23, Matt. 15:8-9) If we're about the business of doing His will, we won't have time to get entangled in the sins we were warned displease Him, will we? (2Tim. 2:3-4)

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2*

*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 12:28-29

The Scriptures contain some examples of instances where only half of the people who could have been saved were wise and heeded the warning. The five out of ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom (Matthew 25, above—notice how Ephesians 5, which focuses on the bride of Christ and her readiness, also cautions us in verses 15-17 to be ready—wise, not foolish), the three people saved out of Sodom out of six who could have been saved (Gen. 19), and the one of two at the mill, in the field or in one bed (Luke 17:34-35). This is your chance to wake up and be prepared. We don't know the day or the hour, but

we were given clues as to the season. The events given in those clues are happening in our time.

The very first hint was in Genesis 1. God created the world and rested on the seventh day. Next is Psalm 90 where we discover that a thousand years is like a day to God. This was quoted and reaffirmed in 2Pet. 3:8. The reign of Christ on earth, characterized by a time of unparalleled peace, health and prosperity (Isaiah 65) lasts one thousand years (Rev. 20). Jesus is our "Sabbath rest" and through Him, we enter into the "promised land" of His millennial kingdom (to be handed over to the Father at the end, when our triune, ONE God will begin His reign of His people forever. Heb. 4:8-10, 1Cor. 15:24-28, Rev. 21:3) So that leaves approximately six thousand years of history to be completed before Jesus returns and begins the Sabbath seventh "day" of one thousand years, followed by eternity. (Isa. 2, 60, Psalms 2, 45, 72, Zech. 8:20-23, 14, Ezek. 36:34-36)

The time-keeping over that long of a period gets rather complicated, but not to worry—God gave us more clues. He said that the "fig tree" would bud and the generation that saw it would see His return. (Matt. 13:28-30) In Song of Solomon (a typological story of Jesus and His bride), verse 2:13 also refers to the fig tree, and the bridegroom bids the bride to rise and "come away" with him. If we go back to Psalm 90, we see that man's life span is expected to be 70 or 80 years. Israel (the fig tree) officially became a nation again in May of 1948 after being destroyed in AD 70. So if you add between 70 and 80 years to 1948, you arrive at a window where we MIGHT reasonably expect Jesus to return! There was also the six-day war in 1967 where Jerusalem was recaptured, and so you could possibly consider that the "budding" of the fig tree. On the other hand, some people feel that the fig tree budded in 1947 when the United Nations made a partition plan for Palestine.

Do you need more? There are also clues in that God said He would only strive with man for 120 years. (Gen. 6:3 - This was not the length of time to build the ark—that was 100 years, and people continued living longer than 120 after that for a while.) That is how long Moses lived. He was still strong when he died, but he was not able to enter the promised land due to disobedience. (Typologically, he represented the law, which cannot save people. The name of Joshua, who took the people into the promised land, is essentially the same as Yeshua (in Hebrew language) or Jesus (in Greek language). Heb. 4:8-10) Guess who wrote Psalm 90? It's a prayer of Moses. Another clue in Psalm 90 is that it says "teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom." How do we do that? Well, I think that maybe in addition to the obvious wisdom on the surface, we also do that by multiplying 120 by jubilee time spans, which are fifty years

long (Lev. 25), so the total would be six thousand. Wow. Just as we already suspected. God is not going to strive with sinners forever. The door to salvation is open for a limited time period. Jesus is that door. (John 10:9)

Hosea 6:2 says God has struck down Israel (His faithless wife) but will revive her after two days and raise her up on the third day (the beginning of the millennium on our proposed time table with thousand-year "days".) Are you noticing that these all point to the SAME time frame? It will be two thousand years since the "birth" of the Church on Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was sent, 50 days after the Sabbath the day before Jesus rose from the dead on Firstfruits, a Sunday) in approximately 2033, give or take a few years. (Jesus was definitely "about" thirty years old when He began His ministry and it is accepted by most to have been approximately three years long, but the actual year of His birth is debated.) Many theologians believe that when the Church being built by Jesus (believers indwelt by His Spirit) is complete, then the rapture will occur (so they can be with Him where He is, as He said). At that point, it is generally believed that the Jews will be unblinded/unhardened against recognizing and receiving Jesus as their Savior (which was due to the initial rejection of Him), and then the time of Jacob's trouble, also known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (69 weeks having already been fulfilled), will begin (whereas the Church was promised to be spared from the wrath of God). (Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 9:27, Rom. 5:9, 11:25, 1Thess. 1:10, 5:9)

*"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." Matthew 24:36-42*

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:1-7*

*But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." Daniel 12:4*

*And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay." Habakkuk 2:2-3*

What will happen if we "make fools of ourselves" by getting ready, watching and waiting—reading our Bibles, trying to live in a way that pleases Him, serving one another and telling others about Him? What if we do that, but Jesus doesn't come back during our lifetime as we hoped? Will we regret it and look back wishing we had had "more fun"? I hope not! Jesus said the love of many (or some translations say "most") will grow cold because of lawlessness. Both Paul and John defined lawlessness for us as SIN: wickedness and rebellion against God—not just slipping or stumbling, but deliberately disobeying. (Titus 2:14, 2Cor. 6:14, also see Romans 6 above.) Our love for whom? For everyone but ourselves, it would seem, including God. Jesus asked if He would find faith when He returns. (Luke 18:8)

*And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:11-14*

*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3:4*

When we obey God, it glorifies Him and shows the world what He is like and how worthy He is. Let's not be among those who continue to do wickedly until the end. (2Tim. 3:13, Rev. 22:11) Or among those without "ears to hear." (Luke 14:34-35, 1Cor. 2:14) Or people who know what is right to do, but they just don't do it. (Luke 6:46, Jam. 1:22, 4:17) Jesus is our example of obedience. (Heb. 5:8) Let's love Him more than ourselves or the world. He deserves nothing less. If you have forgotten why, read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52-53 again to see how much our freedom (IF we are His—and the offer is available to all) from our eternal punishment of hell cost Him.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests,*

*but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 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 2:3-16*

*For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the **fruit** of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:5-17*

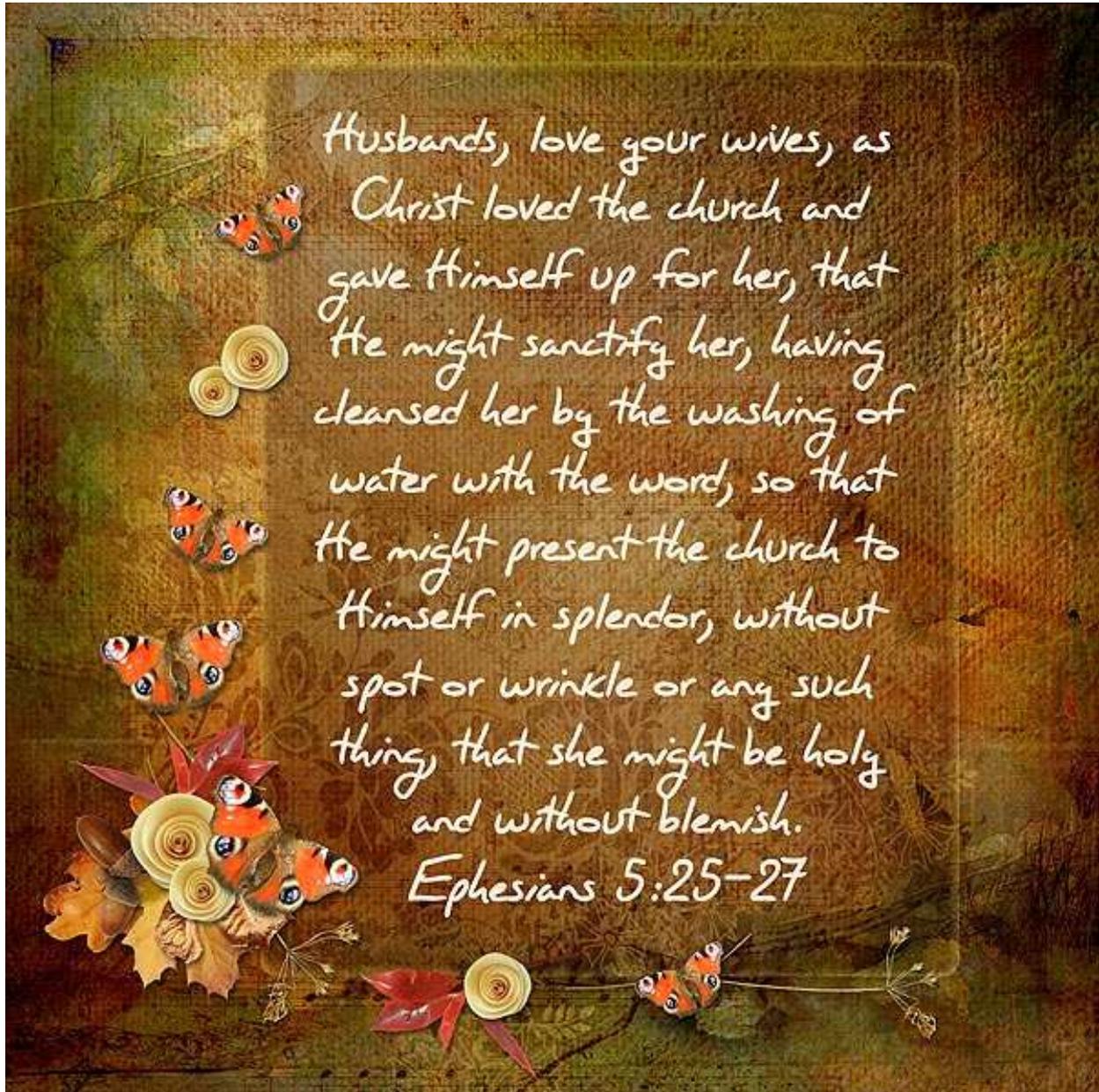
*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins*

*with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:12-19*

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:12-13*

*Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. 53:1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

Written by Tricia Berg, November 2016 (33 pp. + digital scrapbook layout) *If this article has blessed you, please feel free to share it without modifications (and of course, don't claim it as your own or sell it).*



Layout credits: kit: Autumn Days by Designs by Brigit