

## Cain's Offering

by Tricia Berg

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and **Abel** also brought of the **firstborn of his flock** and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."** Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."  
Genesis 4:1-14

Because God accepted his brother Abel's offering, but was not pleased with his own offering, Cain killed his brother - the first death, by the first murder. Why was God pleased with Abel's offering? Because it reflected God's own heart—it was the firstborn (firstfruits) of his flock (presumably without any defects), just like God's future offering of His only begotten, firstborn Son, Jesus, our Passover Lamb. (1Pet. 1:17-21, Heb. 1, 1Cor. 5:7)

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*  
Ephesians 5:1-2

No doubt Abel cared for his lamb and loved it like family, just like David (a man after God's own heart - Acts 13:22) would later care for the sheep of his family as a "type" of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. (1Sam. 17, Ezek. 34:22-24, Ezek. 37:24, John 10) Cain's offering was grain. Grain doesn't follow you around like animals do a shepherd. (John 10:27-29) Grain is not given a

name. (John 10:3-5) We don't even know if Cain gave the firstfruits of his grain (which is equated to the best in the Bible - Exo. 34:26, Deut. 18:4, Deut. 26:1-11, Neh. 10:35, Prov. 3:9-10).

The problem isn't that God will only accept an animal as an offering. We don't kill anything in this age in our "sacrifices" to God (except our old nature, which is to be put to death daily - 2Cor. 4:10, Luke 9:23, Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:3-5). The problem with Cain's offering is the same problem that can go wrong with our own offerings. What we are willing to give up for God shows what's in our HEARTS—do we offer Him the first and best, or leftovers, keeping back the best for ourselves? (Mal. 1:6-8) That is why the Lord tells Cain that if he offers in the right way, it will be accepted. He must offer from his HEART. If he LOVES God, then he will WANT to give his BEST. But he loves himself first (which is idolatry, as is self-serving greed - Eph. 5:5, 1Cor. 5:11). Cain was a murderer not only from the moment Abel died, but from the time he hated his brother in his heart. (Matt. 5:21-22, 1John 3:15)

*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*

*Through him [Jesus] then let us continually **offer up a sacrifice of praise to God**, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to **do good and to share what you have**, for **such sacrifices are pleasing to God**. Hebrews 13:15-16*

Instead of having good fruit come out of a good heart, Cain showed the true state of his heart by killing his brother out of jealousy - like that will solve the problem? Like God won't know? (Acts 5:1-11, Heb. 4:13, Zeph. 1:12-18, Rev. 2:21-23) He denied having anything to do with it or even knowing where his brother was afterwards.

*"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the **good treasure of his heart produces good**, and the **evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil**, for out of the abundance of the **heart** his mouth speaks." Luke 6:43-45*

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil***

**one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 3:11-24 (Also see Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-14)**

This is why Jesus said that the one who LOVES Him will obey. (John 14:15-26) They will gladly (even if not always easily) give up control of their own life to control by His Holy Spirit within them. (Gal. 5:16-25, Titus 2:11-15, 1John 1:5-2:11) This is why we are warned not to let the deceitfulness of sin and riches grab a hold of us. (Matt. 13:18-23, Heb. 3:12-13) We might love them more than God, grieving and quenching the Spirit until we no longer hear Him at all, not even to continue believing. (Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19-22) We can't "lose" the gift of faith, but we can fail to appreciate it to the point that we throw it away—that we love this world so much that we choose to obey our passions that were to have become our "former" desires once we came to the knowledge of the TRUTH. (John 14:6, Heb. 10:26-31, Heb. 12:14-17) We might deceive ourselves into thinking that God doesn't SEE what we do, like Cain did. Sin is STILL crouching at the door, trying to gain control of us. (Jam. 1:13-16) The one who is still enslaved to sin (unable to stop practicing the sins that they were to have been delivered FROM - Eph. 4:17-24, Eph. 5:3-12, 2Cor. 5:14-15, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 1Pet. 4:1-5, 2Pet. 1:9-11) is NOT free and will not reside in God's house forever. (John 8:34-36, 2Pet. 2:19, Rom. 6:12-23)

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile***

**to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:5-17

They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive." Understand, O dullest of the people! **Fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke?** He who teaches man knowledge—the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage; for **justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.** Psalm 94:6-15 (Also see Rev. 18, Rev. 16:4-7, Rev. 19:1-3.)

"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who **hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.** As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but **the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.** As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." Matthew 13:18-23

*"You are the salt of the earth, but **if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.** You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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 5:13-16*

*But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.** But as for you, O man of God, **flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession** in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:6-12*

People who believe (and possibly teach) that God is like a hammer waiting to come down and pound anyone who isn't perfect at all times are deceived (and possibly deceivers). God does NOT force us to obey Him. The obedience to Him of His children is out of LOVE. There is NO WAY to force anyone to love someone. We all know that. Those who DO love God and belong to Him will be disciplined out of LOVE as needed. Whoever refuses to discipline their child HATES their child. God's words, not mine. (Prov. 13:24) A willful, disobedient child is a shame instead of a delight to his or her parents. (Prov. 29:15, 17, Prov. 20:7, Prov. 22:15, Prov. 23:13-14, Prov. 28:7) Would God say that to us about OUR children and then let HIS children run wild? No. He wouldn't. (Deut. 8:5) Remember, there's a difference between punishment and discipline even though both are unpleasant at the time. Jesus took ALL of our punishment upon Himself on the cross. (2Cor. 5:19-21, Rom. 3:21-26, 1John 2:2, Col. 1:19-20)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against*

*himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for **discipline** that you have to **endure. God is treating you as sons.** For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are **illegitimate** children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. **Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:1-11*

Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the **firstfruits** of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. **My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.** Proverbs 3:9-12 (Also see my articles "[Wisdom from Above](#)" and "[Buy Wisdom](#)".)

Those whom I love, I **reprove and discipline**, so be zealous and **repent.** Revelation 3:19

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. **For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.** We love because he first loved us. **If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1 John 4:18-21

All of the relationships we experience in this life (mother/father, husband/wife, parent/child, brother/sister, friend, employer/employee, ruler/subject, etc.) are examples of some aspect of our relationship with God. That is why we, if we are His children, must follow HIS pattern and design for those relationships. The lesson is lost otherwise. If we rearrange everything the way we think is best, we make ourselves into "gods" instead of submitting to the ONE, TRUE God. (Isa. 29:16) God is faithful and desires faithfulness. (Psa. 100:5, Rev. 2:10, Rev. 3:11, Matt. 25:21, Luke 19:17, Gal. 6:7-10, Luke 9:62, Matt. 10:32-33) God is love and desires love—don't forget that love equals

obedience to God. (Psa. 40:6-7, John 14:15-21, Matt. 7:13-14, Matt. 7:21-29, Luke 6:46-49, Jam. 2:14-26) He is just and compassionate and desires justice and compassion. (Isa. 1:16-17, Amos 5:15, Matt. 5:43-48) And don't forget, God is truth and desires truthfulness. (John 1:14, Eph. 4:25-32, Rev. 21:8) We don't PICK which of these we like and discard the rest.

*The works of his hands are **faithful and just**; all his precepts are **trustworthy**; they are established **forever and ever**, to be performed with **faithfulness and uprightness**. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! The fear of the LORD is the firstfruits of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! Psalm 111:7-10*

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.** 1 John 4:7-8*

*For I desire **steadfast love and not sacrifice**, the **knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings**. Hosea 6:6*

***But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the **law of liberty**, and **perseveres**, being no hearer who forgets but a **doer who acts**, he will be **blessed** in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.** James 1:22-27*

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you **abide in my word**, you are truly my **disciples**, and you will know the **truth**, and the truth will set you **free**." John 8:31-32*

*Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father **except through me**." John 14:6*

*If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. **Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.** And this is the*

testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.  
1 John 5:9-12

The first step is faith. Whoever doesn't believe will perish. (John 3:18, 3:36) Then we get to know more about our great God and we come to love and respect Him. It truly sinks in for us what it has cost Him to save us, and we are grateful. Out of that love, gratitude and respect comes obedience to His perfect will and trust in His perfect ways. It's not complicated!

And **without faith it is impossible to please him**, for **whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.** Hebrews 11:6

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

So will we humble ourselves? Jesus set us an example to follow. (Phil. 2:5-11, Matt. 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-45, Matt. 23:11-12) Will we take the time to KNOW God? We do this by reading our Bibles and also by observing the wonderful things He has done around us—by everything He has made—all of nature testifies to His work of creation. (Rom. 1:18-20)

**The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.** Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. **Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.** In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course **with joy**. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. The law of the LORD is perfect, **reviving the soul**; the testimony of the LORD is sure, **making wise the simple**; the precepts of the LORD are right, **rejoicing the heart**; the commandment of the LORD is **pure, enlightening the eyes**; the fear of the

LORD is **clean, enduring forever**; the rules of the LORD are **true, and righteous altogether**. **More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb**. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in **keeping** them there is **great reward**. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Psalm 19:1-14

Will we contemplate what it was like for God to give up His one and only begotten Son for us, and for Jesus to suffer and lay down His life for us? If that isn't love, then what is? (John 15:12-17)

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Romans 5:6-8*

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** 1 John 4:9-10

"For God so **loved** the world, that he **gave his only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be **saved through him**. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." John 3:16-18

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and **I lay down my life for the sheep**. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be **one flock, one shepherd**. For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life that I may take it up again**. No one takes it from me, but **I lay it down of my own accord**. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." John 10:14-18

*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. 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

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God **on our behalf.** Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared **once for all** at the end of the ages **to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been **offered once to bear the sins of many,** will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. Hebrews 9:24-28

There is a picture of how God would later offer His Son when Abraham was tested as to whether he would obey the voice of God telling him to offer up his son whom he loved (the only one of his wife, Sarah—a son of promise born after waiting for him a lifetime). Abraham didn't have to sacrifice Isaac in the end, but he trusted God and was willing to do so if God required it. (Gen. 22) He KNEW that God would NEVER do anything evil. (Psa. 5:4-6) He knew that there was a good purpose in all of it, which turned out to be how he passed the test and became the "father" of our faith. (Gen. 22:15-18, Rom. 4:16-25, Matt. 22:32, Heb. 11:17-19) (Just as God gave His Son ONCE, this test of Abraham was a ONE-time event. God does NOT tell anyone else to kill their child. Those who say they hear a voice telling them to do wicked things are NOT hearing from God.)

From Abraham's son Isaac came Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel and he became the father of the twelve tribes. (Gen. 32:28, Gen. 35:22-26) Gentile believers in this age are being grafted into the "olive tree" of God's chosen people, Israel. (Rom. 11:17-36, Rom. 9:4-5, Acts 15:10-11, 19-20, Acts 21:25, Col. 2:16-19, 23, John 6:63, Rom. 14:5-21, 1Tim. 4:1-4) (Note that from olives come oil that fuels lamps and gives light. Isa. 49:1-7, Luke 2:32, Acts 26:12-18, Acts 13:47, Acts 26:22-23, 2Cor. 4:3-7, Matt. 25:1-13)

In fact, the way that Abraham obtains a wife for Isaac is also a picture of the Father drawing believers to Jesus. Rebekah was not FORCED to follow the servant (a picture of the Holy Spirit) back to Isaac. She went willingly. So will we follow Jesus with our whole hearts, if we are wise like Rebekah, and also like Caleb (who entered the promised land—a picture of the kingdom of God—after following God wholeheartedly). (Gen. 24, Num. 32:10-13, Deut. 1:34-36, Josh. 14:14)

If we do these things—if we will humble ourselves and admit that God is God and we are not, and seek to know Him, I guaranty that LOVE will be the result. TRUE love—not as the world loves, which means permissiveness, but the kind that comes from God—with fruits of the Spirit, including love and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23) We are NOT left on our own to try to do God's will and please Him. (John 14:15-21, Phil. 2:12-16)

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having **escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire**. For this very reason, make every effort to **supplement your faith***

with virtue, and **virtue with knowledge**, and knowledge with self-control, and **self-control with steadfastness**, and steadfastness with godliness, and **godliness with brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with **love**. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins**. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. 2 Peter 1:3-15

**Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry**. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. **Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator**. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. **Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive**. And above all these **put on love**, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God**. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:5-17 (Also Col. 3:18-25)

**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**. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one

another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:15-21

If we PREFER to be "free" according to the definition of this world (to do evil), then God WILL "give us up" (but not until we have resisted His Spirit to the point of finally renouncing our faith altogether, no longer believing - Heb. 6:4-8) and let us go our own way. (Rom. 1:24-32, 2Pet. 2:18-22, John 8:34, 1John 3:4-10) But the end result will be DRASTICALLY different than what we expected. We will find in the end that we have given up our soul to gain the world, and that the world has passed away, leaving us with nothing but an eternity of suffering to look forward to. Not a pretty sight, is it?

***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***

*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*

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. **From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And **the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and **they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.** Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And **if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** Revelation 20:11-15*

We have received an amazing offer. We can become children of God by believing in our hearts and confessing with our mouths that Jesus, the Son of

God, died for us to take the punishment for OUR sins, and rose again to be our Lord, King and Savior FOREVER—starting in THIS life. (Rom. 10:8-10, Rev. 19:16, Rev. 17:14, Psa. 2)

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But **to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** John 1:10-13*

**See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; **no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.** Little children, **let no one deceive you.** Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him [the Holy Spirit], and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. **By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.** For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 1 John 3:1-10

*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 2:11-15 (Also see 1Pet. 2:9-12, Eph. 2:10, Eph. 5:25-27, Mal. 3:13-4:3.)*

**Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you**

**were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made **without hands**, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been **buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were **dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made **alive** together with him, having **forgiven** us all our trespasses, by **canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**. This he set aside, **nauling it to the cross**. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by **triumphing over them** in him. Colossians 2:6-15

Also see Rom. 6, Rom. 2:28-29. We are baptized into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit when we believe (which saves us - John 6:63), and we are baptized in water to signify the death by “drowning” of our old sinful self and our rising out of the water as a new, clean creation in Christ, into His resurrection. It is as though we died on the cross with Him, resurrected with Him and are even seated with Him above. (See Col. 3.) However, this does not nullify all of the instructions to walk in a manner worthy of our Savior. (Phil. 1:27, Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10, 1Thess. 2:12, Rom. 2:1-13) Because we are children of God, we have a higher standard than before we knew better—but His Spirit in us helps us, and we do everything out of LOVE, gratitude and respect. (1Pet. 1:13-25) The more our formerly hard hearts are “circumcised” (made soft and feeling again—no longer calloused) over our multitude of sins, the more we will recognize how unworthy we are of Jesus, and the more grateful we will be for what He has done to save us. (2Cor. 6:11-13, Matt. 10:37)

**For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.** 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort*

of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. **Now which of them will love him more?**" Simon answered, "**The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.**" And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. **Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.**" And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your **faith** has saved you; go in **peace**." Luke 7:36-50

We must NOT be like Cain and hate our brother for loving God more than we do. (1John 3:11-15) The solution isn't to kill our brother (whether literally or with hatred in our heart). And it's not a contest of who can do the most and best works. It's about testing the heart to see who loves God and who doesn't.

*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and **the LORD tests hearts.** Proverbs 17:3*

**Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!** And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalm 139:23-24

**"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 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. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:15-27***

Jesus is the Head of the Church, which is His Body (remember, the two become one, and in SPIRITUAL matters, gender is irrelevant. 1Cor. 6:15-20, Col. 1:18, Eph. 5:23, Rev. 19:7-8, Gal. 3:28, Mark 12:25) The Father is NOT giving His Son a bride who doesn't even respect Him, let alone love Him. How would that be considered part of "the joy set before Him"? (Heb. 12:2, Isa. 53:11, Phil. 2:8-11) James said even demons believe there is one God, but they don't OBEY. (Jam. 2:19) Jesus said even evil people know better than to give a snake to their child who asks for fish or a stone to the child who asks for bread. (Matt. 7:9-10) Likewise, we want our children to be happy in their marriages. How much more then will God, who DESIGNED marriage to teach us about selflessness, faithfulness and more, feel the same way about His Son's marriage? (Prov. 31:10, Prov. 21:19, John 6:35-40, John 17:6, Matt. 22:1-14, 2Cor. 11:2-4, Rom. 7:4-6, Rev. 19:6-9, Psa. 45)

God allows trials in our lives in order to see if we will continue to put our faith in Him or if we'll abandon Him at the first sign of trouble, like a fair-weather friend. Some of the "trials" may seem GOOD. Like the man whose crop harvest was so plentiful that he decided to tear down his barns and build larger ones. (Luke 12:15-31, 2Cor. 9:6-11) Unlike him, the widow who gave to the temple treasury all she had to live on passed the test. (Mark 12:41-44) (Not that we must each do that, but God desires us to be generous, acknowledging that all of our blessings come from Him. We can be sure that the widow didn't starve to death. Psa. 37:25-26, 2Cor. 9:11, Luke 3:10-14, Gal. 6:6, 10, Eph. 4:28, 1Tim. 6:17-21, Heb. 13:16) Some trials won't seem related at all to our faith in Jesus as our Savior, but it's a matter of whether we really believe God is able or not—such that we TRUST Him, and whether or not we RESPECT Him and care more about pleasing Him than ourselves and others. (Rom. 8:28, Isa. 55:8-9, Gal. 1:10) And some of our tribulations are obvious attacks against us BECAUSE of our faith—will we deny Jesus to make our earthly lives easier? (Matt. 5:10-11, Matt. 10:28-33, Luke 12:4-12, 2Tim. 2:12, Heb. 10:32-39, Phil. 1:27-30, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Jam. 1:12, 1Pet. 4:12-19)

***Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have **walked** in my **integrity**, and **I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes,*****

***and I walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. Psalm 26:1-5 (Also see 1Cor. 15:33-34, 2Cor. 6:14-18, Eph. 5:6-12.)***

***Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:1-6***

***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. Proverbs 3:5-12***

God is pleased with the sacrifices that He specified, not with our doing things our own way, to please ourselves, and then saying it was for Him. For example, "shining our light before men" does not mean marching in a parade holding a sign with profanity on it. (Titus 3:1-3, Eph. 4:29) "Speaking the truth in love" doesn't mean shouting at someone who is burying their loved one that God hates them—nor does it mean telling everyone what they want to hear even if it's NOT biblical truth. (1Pet. 3:8-17, 2Tim. 4:3-4, Eph. 4:15)

***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***

Let love be genuine. **Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. **Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Romans 12:9-21

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** 1 Peter 2:1-5

Let them **thank the LORD for his steadfast love**, for his wondrous works to the children of man! And let them offer **sacrifices of thanksgiving**, and tell of his deeds in **songs of joy!** Psalm 107:21-22

We are all called to serve the Lord in various ways and not to judge another's service as being lesser than ours or to try to force them to do everything to our preferences, but that is not the same as keeping leaven out of the pure lump (the Body of Christ). (Rom. 14, Rom. 12:3-8, 1Cor. 12:4-13:7, 1Cor. 5, Gal. 6:1-5, Jam. 5:19-20, Matt. 18:15-17, Matt. 7:5, John 7:24, 1Tim. 5:21, Jam. 2:1)

Cain made an offering, but it wasn't what God desired. (This was made known to him by God, not by Abel.) As happened more than once in the Bible, it was

the younger of the two brothers with whom God was pleased. (Rom. 9:10-12, Gen. 48:17-20) But instead of following the example of Abel as to how to please God, Cain showed the evil, filthy condition of his heart by his works: jealousy and coveting the praises his brother had received, hatred, disregard for what pleased God, lying, murder, refusing to accept blame for his actions, trying to escape discipline—in fact, he was worried about being killed for killing his brother—how ironic! He apparently felt no empathy for Abel or remorse over his actions, just sorry for himself at being caught and punished.

*"But what comes out of the **mouth** proceeds from the **heart**, and this **defiles a person**. For **out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.**" Matthew 15:18-19*

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the **desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other**, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** Galatians 5:16-21*

***Let brotherly love continue.** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison [for the sake of Christ], as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body [of Christ]. **Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have**, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" **Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. Hebrews 13:1-10*

The GOOD NEWS is that our hearts can be sprinkled clean by the precious blood of Jesus. (Heb. 10:22) If we will humble ourselves and believe, His Spirit will come inside of us and revive our spirits that are dead because of sin. He

will make us a NEW creation. There is no such thing as being able to earn salvation or of perfecting ourselves. God offers us the FREE gift of salvation AND of the Spirit who dwells in us and helps us to please God, witnessing that we are God's children. (Acts 10:45, 1John 4:4, Gal. 4:6, 1John 5:10) When we believe and choose to make HIM our delight and joy, then all of the wonderful promises that God has made to those who love Him apply to us—beginning with salvation. (John 5:21-29, John 6:40, John 10:28, John 17:1-6, Rom. 6:22-23, Heb. 6:11-12, 1Tim. 6:12)

**"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who overcomes, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** Revelation 3:20-22

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. 1 John 2:23-29 (Also see John 14:15-18, 26, John 15:8-10.)

Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

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. Romans 6:1-4

For by **grace you have been saved through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

*For we ourselves were **once** foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he **saved** us, **not** because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, whom he **poured out on us** richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become **heirs according to the hope of eternal life**. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. Titus 3:3-11*

This invitation is so much better than any worthless thing you could have possibly thought was valuable during this short life. Whoever is wise will take hold of it right away and treasure it—not “trade it in” for anything this decaying, deceived world offers as “priceless” according to its “wisdom.” (1Cor. 1:18-31, 1Cor. 2:14, 1Tim. 6:20-21)

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

*For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. **Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.** Luke 12:30-34*

"The **kingdom of heaven is like treasure** hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the **kingdom of heaven** is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of **great value**, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

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

Investing all of our hope and desire in this temporary world is sort of like choosing a plastic ring from a Cracker Jacks box NOW instead of the most expensive diamond ring there could ever be—but we have to WAIT for it. Foolish. That’s what the prodigal son did. He wanted his inheritance NOW. He wanted to enjoy every wicked thing the world had to offer instead of honoring his father and waiting for the full value of it to come in at the proper time. Another example is Esau. He was more concerned with satisfying his immediate need for food than with his firstborn inheritance and blessing that was so far off. He regretted it after it was too late. Don’t be like him! (Luke 15:11-32, Gen. 25:29-34, Gen. 27:30-38, Heb. 12:14-17, Phil. 3:17-19, 1Pet. 2:21, Phil. 1:29-30)

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are **seen** are **transient**, but the things that are **unseen** are **eternal**.*** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So **run that you may obtain it**. Every athlete **exercises self-control in all things**. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an **imperishable**. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But **I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified**.* 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

***Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:3-7*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.** What you have learned and received and heard and seen*

in me—**practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you.  
Philippians 4:4-9

**If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.** But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.** 1 Corinthians 15:19-23

Ask anyone who truly loves God if they feel like they're "missing out" on anything, or if they wish they had "lived more" before dedicating their lives to Christ. They will tell you that their only regret is having waited so long, but God knows everything from the beginning to the end. He is able to make good come out of even the most discouraging circumstances (including our past), for those who LOVE Him. (Rom. 8:28) And they are the ones Jesus has gone to prepare a place for and will be returning for. (Read all of John 14-15.) Those who love Him invite others to "come, drink" — to come into the LIGHT, out of that LOVE they have for God and for those who are still walking in darkness. (John 3:19-21, John 8:12, John 4:13-14)

For this is the **love of God**, that we **keep his commandments**. And his commandments are **not burdensome**. 1 John 5:3

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain Christ and be found in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.** Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell

*you even with tears, walk as **enemies of the cross of Christ**. Their end is **destruction**, their god is their **belly**, and they **glory in their shame**, with minds set on earthly things. But **our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body**, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:8-21*

*But, as it is written, "**What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.**" 1 Corinthians 2:9*

*"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. **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 14:1-3*

***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 4:16-18*

*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*

***The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."** And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the **water of life without price.** Revelation 22:17*

Each of us has to choose for themselves whether they will seek God or make themselves into "god." We will each answer for ourselves. Do we care more about what the LOST world thinks and put our trust in them (when they obviously don't know where they're going), or perhaps trust in our own limited intellect (1Cor. 3:18-20, Psa. 14:1-3), or do we care more about eternity and pleasing GOD? (Ecc. 12:13-14) Do we believe, or not? (Isa. 43:8-13)

"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." Matthew 7:13-14 (Also see 1John 3:1-10)

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. **They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.** 1 John 4:4-6

**"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." John 15:18-21

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the **master of the house Beelzebul**, how much more will they malign those of his household. So **have no fear of them**, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And **do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. **So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.**" Matthew 10:24-33

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? **If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.** Galatians 1:10

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. But as for you, **continue in what you have learned and**

**have firmly believed**, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:12-17

There is a day coming when it will be too late to "change sides," or to go back and give God more than crumbs of our lives. (Matt. 25, Mark 13:32-37, Isa. 45:21-25, Luke 16:19-31) As the saying goes, "Would there be enough evidence to 'convict' us if we were 'accused' of being believers in Jesus?" Those who have His Spirit belong to Him, and His presence inside of them: 1) bears FRUIT, and 2) is the guaranty of their redemption. (2Cor. 1:21-22, 2Cor. 5:5, 1John 3:24, 1John 4:13, Rev. 5:9-10)

But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:22-26

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 (Also see John 1:1-3, John 1:13, Psa. 33:6, 1Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:1-2, Rev. 19:11-16, Rev. 2:12-17)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "**I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.**" Jeremiah 17:9-10

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 3:12-15

For those who DO love God, and show it by obeying Him, don't forget to put on His full armor! For those who say they love God but don't obey Him—do you believe it when someone says with their mouth that they love you, but by their actions show that they could care less about what pleases you? Think about it. (John 4:23, Mark 7:6-9, John 14:24, John 15:10) (Again, we're under the "law of liberty," by which we will be judged by Jesus as to how we exercised that freedom, whether to please ourselves or for HIS glory. Jam. 2:8-26)

***Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brothers throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6-11***

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end **keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may **declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.**** Ephesians 6:10-20***

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