

Children of God

by Tricia Berg

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. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:16-18

The above passage precedes the verse I used in yesterday's (May 25, 2019) daily scrapbook verse. When I was thinking about that, (i.e. meditating on it - Biblical meditation is NOT clearing the mind of everything, but focusing on God's word - 1Tim. 4:11-16, 2Tim. 3:14-17, Phil. 4:8-9, Col. 3:1-2)—"the creation longs for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19 - please note I will be using mostly paraphrasing today rather than direct quotes, which would vary by translation version anyway), it made me think of related verses, including these that precede the passage at the top—"IF you put to death the DEEDS of the body you will live, but those who live according to the flesh will die; all who are LED by the spirit are sons of God." (Rom. 8:13-14) This is not merely mental consent to believing, but putting that faith into action—and not by sheer effort and will power, but by the Spirit who MUST be IN a person for them to enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-8, Rom. 8:9-11) Our "old self" is to DIE and we are to live to Christ. (Col. 3:3-10, Gal. 5:24, Rom. 13:14, Eph. 4:22-24, Gal. 2:20, 6:4, 14, Rom. 7:4 - and "bear fruit.")

Other passages that came to mind include: "You are my brother, sister or mother IF you DO the will of God." (Matt. 12:46-50) - if believing were ALL of God's will for His children as some say—and let's face it, they don't really believe, or they would behave like it, through the power of the Spirit IN them, who is NOT present if they do NOT belong to Jesus (Rom. 8:9, 2Cor. 13:5)—then Paul wouldn't have written 1Thess. 4:3-8 - "God's will is your sanctification and holiness;" Heb. 12:14-17 - "Strive for holiness, without which no one will see the Lord;" Rom. 12:1-2 - "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice and discern God's will;" Eph. 6:6 - "Do the will of God from the heart;" Phil. 2:12-13 - "Obey, work OUT your salvation with fear and trembling, God works IN you both to desire and do His good pleasure;" Rom. 6:17-18 - "obedient from the heart;" Rom. 16:19 - "Your obedience is known to all, be wise to good and innocent as to evil;" Col. 1:9-10 - "Be filled with the knowledge of His will, walking in a manner worthy of Him, fully pleasing to Him and bearing fruit;" Rom. 7:4-6 - "Bear fruit for God, not death, in the new way of the spirit;" (also Rom. 6:20-22); Eph. 5:8-12 - "You are now children of light,

so walk as such and discern what is pleasing to the Lord," 2Cor. 5:14-15 - "We're to live not for ourselves, but for Jesus;" Heb. 5:14 - "Powers of discernment trained by practice to distinguish good from evil;" Heb. 13:20-21 - "Equipped to do His will, what is pleasing in His sight." Also, Peter said in 1Pet. 2:15-16 - "Silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good, and do not use your freedom in Christ as a cover for evil;" and John said in 1John 3:22-24 - "Keep His commandments and do what pleases Him, and whoever keeps His commandments [plural] ABIDES in Him" (also see John 15:10); and 1John 5:2 - "Love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments [plural];" and Jesus taught in Luke 12:47-48 - "The worthless servant knew his master's will but did not get ready." (Also Matt. 25:10—also do a search in the Bible about keeping watch.)

If there is only ONE requirement to inherit the kingdom of God—believing—then we wouldn't need to ABIDE in Jesus (John 14:15-26, 15:1-21) and to obey Jesus' commands (plural - 1John 5:3). The "apostle of love" (1John 4:11), "beloved" by Jesus (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:20) spoke OFTEN about obedience; see John 15:12-17, Mark 12:28-34, Matt. 7:12, Rom. 13:8-10—but don't forget what follows it in 13:11-14—about specific commands). As I always say, it's NOT multiple choice—we put together the Scriptures, not pick and choose which ones we like. If obedience were not important, then Jesus and James would not have made a point to emphasize that it's necessary to DO what the word says, not only HEAR it - Matt. 7:24-27, Jam. 1:22-25 - some called Jesus "Lord" but did NOT enter in, Matt. 21-23 - MANY follow the broad path to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14), which we can see by their bad fruits (Matt. 7:15-20)—so those who are WISE will NOT follow them, but will stay on the narrow path, following in the steps of JESUS - John 14:4-7 - "Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life" John 14:1-3 - "He will prepare a place for us where He's going and return for us," John 14:22-24 - "He will not manifest Himself to everyone, but only to those who love Him and therefore OBEY Him." Those who make a practice of sin will NOT enter the kingdom. (1Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:5-6, Rev. 21:8, 22:15) God knows what's in our hearts, how He gave us a way out of temptation and whether we took it or not, etc. (Heb. 4:12-13, Psa. 139, 1Chron. 28:9, Prov. 17:3, 1Thess. 2:4, Rev. 2:21-23, 1Cor. 10:13)

Remember that when Jesus says "those who do the will of God are His brothers and sisters" (Mark 3:31-35)—He is the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD (John 3:16-18), so His brothers and sisters are also sons/children of God (Heb. 2:10-12, 3:5-6, Matt. 10:25, Eph. 2:19, 1Tim. 3:15, 1Pet. 4:17, Rom. 8:29, those whom all creation is longing to see revealed at His coming - Rom. 8:19, 23, 2Tim. 4:8, Heb. 9:28, Luke 17:32-35, Matt. 24:36-51—the Greek word translated as "taken" in the previous two passages carries the idea of close association with oneself, such as when Joseph was told not to be afraid to take

Mary as his wife - Matt. 1:20—"one of two taken" emphasizes the fact that association with another human will not save anyone—it's personal, requiring an individual choice of whether to accept the free gift or not (Psa. 49:7-9, Josh. 24:15, Matt. 10:34-49, Rom. 6:22-23, Eph. 2:8-10, Jam. 1:18, John 1:12-13)—but those who heed the warnings of those who care enough to provide them will be saved - Jam. 5:19-20, Matt. 18:15, John 15:20, 1John 4:5-6, Jude 1:23, 2Tim. 2:24-26, Matt. 10:40.) We're "born again" by His Spirit and "made one" with His Spirit (Jam. 1:18, 1Pet. 1:3, 23, John 3:3-8, 1Cor. 6:17-20, Eph. 5:29-32—whereas Jesus is one with the Father - John 10:30, 8:58, 14:10-11, 20, 17:20-26, John 1:1-3, Col. 1:16).

I think we can probably also say that those who do the will of God are the same as those referred to as "sons of the resurrection who were counted WORTHY" in Luke 20:34-36. Jesus is "Head of His Father's household, and we are His household IF we hold fast" (Heb. 3:5-11); "Don't let the deceitfulness of sin harden your heart." (Heb. 3:12-15, like in the Parable of the Sower - Mark 4:3-20, and 1Cor. 10:1-6, 1Pet. 2:4-12.) Jesus is Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23, Col. 1:18), so it would seem that His Father's household is also the Church, which makes sense since the members of the Body of Christ are part of a royal priesthood. (1Pet. 2:4-5, Rev. 5:9-10) The "sons of Zadok [meaning righteousness, also see 1John 2:29, 1John 3:7, 10]" (which I believe may be the sons of God, since Jesus is the High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek, which means "King of Righteousness," and Melchizedek had no beginning and has no end - Heb. 7:1-3.)

"Don't give up your firstborn inheritance like Esau did for a bowl of soup" (indulging the flesh in worldly pleasures—more on this later). (Heb. 12:15-17, also see 1John 2:15-17 - "Whoever loves the world is NOT of God" and "All who believed received the right to become children of God" - John 1:12-13, Rom. 8:23-25, 1John 3:1-2, and also 1John 3:3—if merely having the hope was what purifies a person, then there would be no need for John to continue on as he does in 1John 3:4-10, also see Titus 2:12-13, 2Cor. 7:1, 2Tim. 2:21-22; 1John 2:19, John 6:66-69.) "We have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the church of the firstborn" and must "offer to God acceptable worship." (Heb. 12:22-27, 28-29, 1Pet. 1:14-19 - also see Rev. 14:1-5, Rom. 12:1-2, 1Cor. 6:19-20, 3:16-17) Both believing Jews and Gentiles of this age are "grafted into the 'tree' of Israel" (from which unbelieving Jews have been broken off, but can be grafted back into their own tree). (Rom. 11:17-25, John 8:39-40, Gal. 3:28, Rom. 2:29, Eph. 3:6) "[The 'giants of the faith'] have not yet received the promise, as they will not be made perfect/complete apart from us." (Heb. 11:39-40)

"All who WALK in the steps of faith of Abraham are his children and heirs of promise." (Rom. 4:12, 16-17, Gal. 3:7-9, 29, 4:28-31) "[The 'giants of the faith'] knew they were merely sojourners and exiles, and could have returned to the land they left, but they looked forward to a better country, so God has prepared for them a city." (Heb. 11:13-16) WE also are NOT to turn back, and to consider ourselves sojourners and exiles as well. (Heb. 10:39, Matt. 13:20-21, Luke 9:57-62, Matt. 16:24-27, 1John 2:28-3:10, 1Pet. 2:11-12, Phil. 3:20-21 - as opposed to Phil. 3:17-29, 2Cor. 5:1-10)

Those who were beaten "rejoiced that they were counted WORTHY to suffer for the Name." (Acts 5:41) "We should be willing to endure suffering for the sake of the kingdom, knowing that we have a better and abiding possession." (Heb. 10:32-39) To the church in Philippi, it had been "GRANTED to them to suffer for His sake." (Phil. 1:29-30) "We will glory with Him IF we SUFFER with Him." (Rom. 8:16-17) "Let us go to Him outside the camp and bear His reproach." (Heb. 13:13) "We 'compete' in a 'race' for an 'imperishable crown'" (1Cor. 9:24-10:13, 2Tim. 2:3-7, Heb. 12), which involves suffering AND resisting temptation, if it be God's will. (1Pet. 1:6, 3:17) "Those who are steadfast through trials (including temptations) will receive the crown." (Jam. 1:12-16) "If you hold fast, I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10-11) "Hold fast to what you have until I come, let no one seize your crown." (Rev. 3:11-13) "Those who overcome will have this heritage and be my sons. (Rev. 21:7) "Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness and for Jesus' sake are blessed and great is their reward in heaven." (Luke 6:22-23, Matt. 5:10-16 - which continues on about being the salt and light, whereas salt that has LOST its saltiness is THROWN OUT, Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34-35, Col. 4:5-6, Eph. 5:7-17, Phil. 2:14-16, Titus 2:7-8, 1Pet. 4:4, 2Tim. 3:12-16, 1Pet. 3:14-17) "Everyone will be salted with fire," happens when God allows trials to test the genuineness of our faith and to purify us through suffering. (Mark 9:49, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Rev. 3:18-19, Lev. 2:13, Isa. 48:10, Heb. 2:10, 5:8)

If we break the following passage down, it's obvious (even for those who want to say otherwise) that "walking" and "deeds" indicate what we actually DO. It's not only talking about being alive spiritually because of BELIEVING. Technically, EVERYONE "'lives' according to the flesh" (i.e. everyone is ALIVE, IN the flesh), but only those who have been made alive in their spirit BY the HOLY Spirit have been empowered to WALK in the Spirit. (1Cor. 15:22-23, Eph. 2:1-5, Col. 2:12-15) It's one thing to "fall back into fear," not trusting that God will do what He said He would do—and it's another thing to have no respect whatsoever for our heavenly Father, such that we think nothing of disobeying Him! (Psa. 50:16-23) We don't work for salvation (i.e. revert to relying on law-keeping to save us - Gal. 5:4), but IF we ARE saved, then it will SHOW by our works. I once saw a quote by Luther (no doubt one of history's greatest proponents of grace) that

said something like “works don’t make a man good, but a good man does good works.” (Luke 6:43-45, Jam. 2:26—if we have no good works (which includes both doing good - John 12:26 - and refraining from evil - 1Thess. 5:22), then that is evidence that we also have no FAITH. This is serious.)

*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who **walk** not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, **not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh**. For **if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live**. For all who are **led** by the Spirit of God are **sons of God**. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him**. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:3-25*

Furthermore, there seems to be a difference between being SEALED BY and being FILLED WITH the Spirit. We need only believe in order to be SEALED, but

we must willingly take steps to remain FILLED—not to remain saved/sealed, but **filled**—walking in the Spirit, led by the Spirit, abiding in Christ and His love, not grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit by hardening our hearts against God—reducing the fruit of the Spirit, perhaps down to none. (Acts 4:31 - this is an instance subsequent to Pentecost, Acts 9:31, 13:52, Eph. 5:18-33, Rom. 8:4-9, Gal. 5:16, 19-23, 24-25, 1Thess. 5:19-22, Eph. 4:30, Heb. 3:12-15, Matt. 13:22, Eph. 4:20-24) Jesus said that He and His Father would come and make their home (God is ONE) IN those who LOVE Him, which is those who OBEY Him. (John 14:24) Those who are turned away in Matt. 7:21-23 and Luke 6:46-49 do not OBEY Him—they don't walk in and shine HIS light. They're foolish, walking in the dark while claiming to walk in the light. (Matt. 6:22-23, John 3:19-21, 8:12, 12:46, Acts 26:16-18, Rom. 1:21, 13:12-14, Eph. 4:18, 5:11, 1Thess. 5:5, 1John 1:6) They expect to enter the kingdom of God, but they are denied entry. Peter gave a list of what qualities God's children should practice (utilizing the divine power provided to them by His Spirit in them) to ensure that we are not unfruitful, but will be assured of entry into the kingdom. (2Pet. 1:3-15)

God doesn't force us to believe, and neither does He force those who do believe to OBEY. If He wanted robots, He would have made them, but He didn't. We have a choice, and that choice reveals what our true character is like. God is TRUTH and LOVE, and He requires genuine faith, out of LOVE (after which obedience will follow). (John 14:6, Rom. 12:9, John 4:23, 1Pet. 1:6-7, 8-9, John 14:15-26, 15:9-11, 1John 4:10-13, 5:3, 2Cor. 5:14-15, 1Tim. 1:5) "Faith comes from hearing the word." (Rom. 10:17) "His word is a lamp for our feet and light to our path." (Psa. 111:10, 119:105) The foolish virgins (who were denied entry into the kingdom - Matt. 25:1, 10-13) ran out of oil for their lamps to light their way to the Bridegroom. (Matt. 25:8-9, Prov. 23:23, Rev. 3:18-22)

Jesus said "His Father is the Vinedresser who will cut off UNFRUITFUL branches (believers—this was said to the disciples the night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and was later betrayed) from the Vine (Jesus)." (John 15:1-10) Previously, He also taught the Parables of the Sower, Tares and Net (Matt. 13, where many fall away, and those who cause sin are removed), and He told us to "cut off whatever part (a/k/a "member") of our body causes us to sin" (whereas WE are individually members of (and corporately as a whole) HIS Body - Rom. 12:5, 1Cor. 12:12, Eph. 5:23, 30). (Matt. 5:29-30) "Do not be sluggish but imitate those who inherit the promises" instead of "sinning deliberately after coming to the knowledge of the truth." (Heb. 6:9-10, 11-12, 10:26-30) "Confirm your calling and election." (2Pet. 1:10) Jesus is returning "WITH the called, chosen and faithful," "as a thief in the night" when all of the armies are gathered around Jerusalem, to rule and reign for 1,000 years. (Rev. 16:15-16, 17:12-14, 19:11-16, 20:4-6, 2:26-29, 3:21-22, 1Cor. 6:3, Dan.

7:9-10) Those who are part of the first resurrection need not fear the second death (after the second resurrection). (Rev. 20:4-6, 20:11-15)

So it seems like there is a difference between being saved from hell at the second resurrection and receiving the FIRSTBORN inheritance from OUT of the dead prior to the Christ's millennial reign—which Paul sought to attain to. (Phil. 3:8-21—the phrasing in the original Greek carries the connotation of arriving at the destination—the “finish line,” since we know Paul considers the journey to be like an endurance race - 1Cor. 9:24, Heb. 10:36, 12:1-4. In this case, the goal (“prize” - Phil. 3:14, 1Cor. 9:25, 2Tim. 2:5, Jam. 1:12, 2:5, 1Cor. 2:9) is partaking of the firstborn inheritance - Heb. 12:16-17, Gen. 25:29-34, 27:34, 38, Heb. 12:22-23, 1Cor. 9:26-27—also see what immediately follows in 1Cor. 10:1-13—we're to learn by example NOT to desire anything God tells us is evil, nor put God to the test. That is NOT the way to enter in for us any more than it was for them—the promised land was a foreshadow of the kingdom of God.) Paul was successful in reaching his goal, by the power of God. (Col. 1:29, 2Tim. 4:8) He also encouraged Timothy (and us - Phil. 3:14-21) to have the same attitude, giving helpful metaphors and telling him to ask the Lord for wisdom if he didn't understand what was being said. (2Tim. 2:3-5, 6-7)

If everyone received the SAME reward simply for professing faith, but not by WALKING by the Spirit IN that faith, then Paul would certainly not waste his time exhorting everyone to be steadfast, and even saying he had not yet attained what he sought, leaving open the possibility of being “disqualified” (some translations say “cast off.” (Phil. 3:13-17, 1Cor. 9:27, 1Cor. 3:12-14, 15-18 - some will enter in as through the fire with no further reward.) James also encouraged us to persevere (Jam. 1:12, 5:10-11, also Jude 1:20-21, 2Pet. 3:11-18, and other references detailed elsewhere in this article). And don't forget the letters that Jesus sent His angel to have John write to the churches in Rev. 2-3, 22:16. Each one was for each church to read (Rev. 1:11), and contained admonitions and rewards for holding fast until He comes. Not only that, but the warnings to those who refuse to repent include Jesus coming against them (Rev. 2:21-23, 3:3)—who would want to be among them? Better to be among those who enter their chambers while God pours out His wrath. (Isa. 26:20-21, Rev. 15:7-8, John 14:2-3)

Furthermore, if all who believe and are thus saved are given the privilege of ruling, then who would there be left to rule OVER? (Isa. 9:6-7, Psa. 2, 22:28) Although most people don't like to continue on in context after the first few verses of the passage, John says that those who are children of God will not continue PRACTICING sin (that is different than slipping, as we all do at times). (1John 3:1-10) He said right before the "children of God" statement that we should behave in such a way so as not to shrink back from Jesus at His coming.

(1John 2:28-29) There were NO chapter breaks or section headings in the original text. This is all ONE thought process. Earlier in 1John 2:4, he says for the first time that those who PRACTICE sin do NOT know God, but are liars. He basically says it again in 1John 3:6-10 (remember, this is all ONE letter). This all goes along with John 14:15-26 (same author) where Jesus tells us who it is that LOVES Him and what will happen when they DO (and thus, OBEY Him). Earlier in John 14:1-6, Jesus tells the disciples that they know the WAY to where He is going (to prepare a place for them), which is Him (the Door/Gate - John 10:7-9, Matt. 7:13-14, Luke 13:23-30). However, He goes on to reveal that that WAY involves following in His footsteps, not turning back, being willing to suffer if it's God's will. (John 15:10, 19-21, 8:29, Matt. 26:38-39, Heb. 2:10-12, 12:1-8, 13:13, 1Pet. 2:21, 5:6-11, Rom. 8:16-17)

Remember, God teaches us all day, every day through nature as He created it (which for example includes plants, animals and our bodies and the way He made them to function—with seeds and parts fitting together, resulting in reproduction according to each kind—"fruitfulness" - Gen. 1-2, Rom. 1:18-20, Psa. 19, 104, 139), and also through our personal relationships to one another as He designed them (including among the examples are marriage in faithfulness - Mal. 2:13-16, Matt. 19:8, Isa. 54:5, 1Kings 8:23, with respect of the wife for the husband who represents the Lord - Eph. 5:22-33, 1Cor. 6:15-20, 1Cor. 11:3, 1Pet. 3:3-7; respect for parents who represent God - Eph. 6:1-4; and kindness to physical brothers representing spiritual brothers, Lev. 19:18, Gal. 6:10, 1John 2:9-11, 3:11-18, 4:20-21, Matt. 5:21-24, Jam. 2:14-26, Matt. 25:31-46). There are MANY others for you to discover.

The Hebrew year begins in Spring for good reason (and no, there is nothing in the Bible saying that there are "two new years, one spiritual and one civic" - the feast on the first day of the seventh month is called Yom Teruah, not Rosh Hashanah—remember, this change to the feast calendar was originally made by people who do not accept Jesus as their Messiah—people who are still "blinded" and "hardened of heart." Rom. 11:25) Everything springs to life anew in the Spring. When we're born again, we become NEW creations. (2Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15) We're to WALK in that newness (physically, through the power of the Spirit IN us—this is NOT an imaginary concept). (Rom. 6:4, 12-13, 7:4-6, Phil. 2:12-16, Rom. 12:1-2, Titus 2:11-15) The Spirit is NOT visible (John 3:3-8), but the effects of His presence ARE. (Gal. 5:22-25)

I'm sure that many people think that to speak of these things, especially persistently and insistently, is "mean." (Titus 2:15, 3:8, 1Tim. 5:20, 2Tim. 4:1-5, Jam. 4:8-9) I don't think I've previously shared this personal story before, but perhaps it can help put things in perspective. When I was little, my mom used to let us kids split a bottle of soda and share a big bowl of popcorn

at the coffee table while watching TV—only for a special treat on occasion. One time I insisted that I should be able to have my OWN bottle of soda to myself. (I was maybe all of six years old.) After my relentlessly arguing with her about it, she decided to give in. However, she made one condition. I had to finish it before I could go to bed. ("Bonus!" I thought.) Well, as you can imagine, I was FULL not much more than half way through that bottle of soda and wanted to change my mind, but she would not relent. My siblings went to bed on schedule, and whereas I had always thought I would LOVE to stay up late, now all I wanted to do was to go to bed. I kept sipping the soda until I felt like puking, at which time my mom said I could be finished (she's no dummy), and let me go to bed.

So what's the moral of that story? It's not always in our best interests to get what we think we want. Our earthly parents usually know best, and God ALWAYS does. (Matt. 7:11) IF God is our Father (John 1:12-13, 1John 3:1, 1Pet. 1:14-19), then we need to trust His judgment and do as He says. Getting our way may NOT lead to the happiness that we thought it would. As Paul said to the Corinthians, it's better to be grieved for a short while now, if it results in REPENTANCE, than to lose our souls. (2Cor. 2:4-9, 7:8-11, 1Cor. 4:21-5:13) Jesus warned us that it's better to lose our lives than our souls. (Mark 8:34-38, Matt. 10:28) If we're more interested in getting our way than in glorifying, honoring and serving our amazing God, then there is a problem with our faith, which probably begins with the lack of knowledge of Him. (Psa. 84:10-12)

Reassuring everyone who names the name of the Lord, regardless of how they live their lives (i.e. regardless of whether they bear fruit of the Spirit or not - John 15:1-21, Gal. 5:13-25, 2Cor. 13:5), that they will not only enter the kingdom of God but that they will be "out of here" (i.e. "raptured", from the Greek "harpazo" - 1Thess. 4:17, Rev. 12:5) BEFORE anything BAD happens, is reckless. (2Tim. 2:19-26) Some congregations are so sure of it (and I think they really mean those who ARE faithful, but they don't clarify it out of an overabundance of caution against preaching "works salvation") that they make such a belief into a requirement to becoming a "member" of their church (whereas we are members of the Body of Christ, and the Church is not a building or organization, or even a worship service, but a living Body - 1Cor. 12:12, 27, Rom. 12:4-5, 1Pet. 2:4-5, Eph. 2:22.)

Furthermore, there is a difference between the wrath of Satan, which God allows for our testing and purifying (Dan. 11:33-35, Rev. 7:13-17, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Jam. 1:2-4, Isa. 48:10, Rev. 3:18, Rom. 5:9, 1Thess. 5:9-11), and the wrath of GOD, which is "the Day of the Lord" and occurs AFTER the greatest tribulation the world has ever known. (Matt. 24:21-22, Dan. 12:1, Matt. 24:29-32 - signs in the sun, moon and stars AFTER the great tribulation, Joel 2:30-32 - signs in

the sun, moon and stars BEFORE the Day of the Lord, Amos 5:18-20, Rev. 6:12-17, 19:11-21) However, the promise to be kept OUT of the "hour of trial" (Rev. 3:10, 17:12, 13:5 - the terrifying reign of the beast) was made to people who endured severe persecution and held fast through it. (Rev. 3:8-9) The five foolish virgins thought they would enter in, but Jesus didn't KNOW them. (Matt. 25:10-13) Those who are not already dwelling in heaven during the hour of trial (severe testing) must accept the possibility of imprisonment and/or beheading rather than taking the mark of the beast. (Rev. 13, 14:9-13)

But as awful as that sounds, there's another possibility—anyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be DECEIVED, and they WILL take the mark. Their eternal fate is worse. (2Thess. 2:9-12, Rev. 13:7-8, 13-15, 14:9-13, 20:15, Psa. 69:28, Dan. 12:1-4, Mal. 3:16-4:3, Rev. 3:5, 2Pet. 2:19-22) The mark of the beast is not "removable." It's the official sealing as a child of the devil (who always imitates God, and God seals His children - Eph. 1:13, 1Cor. 1:22, Rev. 7:2-3, 2Cor. 11:14, John 8:44). We cannot be BOTH. (1Cor. 10:21, Luke 16:13 - those who take the mark can buy and sell in order to survive. By doing so, they put their trust in the beast instead of God. Psa. 37:17-20, 25-26, 33:13-22) One must also worship the beast in place of God along with taking the mark. Those who do so truly believe that he is actually God because of the signs he's allowed to perform. Rather than regretting what they've done, they will most likely persecute and turn in anyone who refuses to do the same. (Rev. 13)

It seems to me that these days those making false confessions of faith with empty words and no fruits of the Spirit are MANY. We ALL started out as enemies of God, but once we become believers we're supposed to grow more and more Christ-like (from the inside outward, because of His Spirit dwelling in us). So my goal is NOT to scare people into questioning their salvation. (1John 4:18, 3:19-20, 1Cor. 4:3-5, Gal. 6:4-5) I would like to encourage ALL of us, myself included, to make a regular practice of examining ourselves as Paul told us to do by looking for fruits of the Spirit. It's like a spiritual health check-up. (2Cor. 13:5, Gal. 5:16-6:5) Do we find it extremely or increasingly difficult to be obedient to God (which is a sign that we're trying to prevail against this world by our own power instead of by the power of the Holy Spirit in us), or is it such a joy and privilege to belong to Him that it would be painful to bring shame upon Him by behavior He disapproves of? Do we love the "pleasures" of this world so much that we want to find ways to justify continuing in them, giving into their "lures," or do we love God first and consider what this temporary world has to offer as "rubbish" as Paul did? (Phil. 3:8-21, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, Matt. 18:7-9)

Those are hard questions. What do we do if we have to answer them in a negative way (if we're honest)? All I can say is that we need to PRAY (Matt. 26:41, 1Thess. 5:17, Jam. 5:13, Eph. 6:17-18, Jude 1:20-21) and get into the word for ourselves. It's NOT boring or hard to understand when the Spirit Himself is our Teacher. (John 14:16-20, 26, 15:26, 16:13-15, Matt. 23:8-12) I am 100% sure that TO KNOW GOD IS TO LOVE HIM. The MORE we KNOW Him, the MORE we will LOVE Him (and thus, OBEY Him). Guaranteed.

How do you "get into" the Bible? You just dive in. You don't need to buy a pre-made Bible study—just open it up (whether in print or online, such as at BibleHub.com) and start reading. (Please avoid paraphrases—they just aren't true to the original like they should be.) If you tend to skip around, you could keep track of which parts you've read so that you can eventually be sure you've read it all (but if that's a deterrent, then don't). When you come to a footnote or sidenote, if your Bible has them, you can take a moment (but it usually turns into more, and that can be a good thing—it's not a race) to read those and even look up the cross-references for yourself.

You don't "have time," you say? Really? The cares of this world are so much more important than knowing the living God, with whom you hope to spend eternity? (Matt. 13:22, Rev. 21:7, 22:14) There's NOTHING that you could cut out in order to find the time? It amazes me how much time people will spend watching soap operas, sports, "reality" television, etc. or perhaps they invest a LOT of their time making sure to look good, or their home is a literal castle, requiring a huge amount of upkeep—NONE of those things will mean ANYTHING in the next life, except perhaps there will be more to "burn up" when God's fire reveals what is left after removing everything worthless that we unwisely spent our time on. (1Cor. 3:13, 1Tim. 4:7-8) For those who TRULY are overwhelmed just trying to survive—put God FIRST. All blessings come from Him, and we need to acknowledge that and be thankful. (Matt. 6:19-34, Luke 12:13-48, Jam. 1:17, Col. 3:15)

"To the one who has, more will be given." (Mark 4:24-25) One way to look at this is that when we recognize that God is wonderful, He will give us even more reasons to see how wonderful He is. When we MAKE USE of what He gave us, for HIS glory, He will give us MORE. I don't mean the "prosperity gospel," focusing on financial "sowing and reaping," but our entire lives. (Rom. 12:1-2) (Remember, if we're wise, then we hope to serve and worship God forever! Rev. 3:12-13 We're showing Him in this lifetime—making a court case for or against ourselves, you could say—evidencing what we're like by what we value the most.)

This “more will be given” concept includes FAITH in God (in truth and spirit - John 4:23-24, Mark 7:6-9, Jam. 4:8), knowledge of and LOVE for Him, and the JOY and HOPE of knowing Him (Titus 2:11-3:8, 2Pet. 3:18—this includes obedience to what the Word says, and shining His light on this dark world—see Matt. 5:13-16, Mark 4:21-23, Luke 8:16-18, Eph. 5:6-21, Rom. 16:19, 1Pet. 1:14-19); skills, talents, and various opportunities (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27); wisdom (Matt 13:10-17), and more. It also works in REVERSE. To the one who has not, what he has will be taken away—if we don’t appreciate and make wise use of what we’re given, we not only won’t be given more, but what we had been given will be given to someone else. So as I said, we need to put into use for God’s glory everything we receive from Him. We need to be thankful for it, and content in our circumstances, not covetous of the blessings of others. (2Cor. 12:10, Phil. 4:11-13, 1Tim. 6:6-10, Heb. 13:5-6, Luke 16:13-15, 12:15, Acts 20:33, Mark 7:20-23, Rom. 1:29-32, 7:7, 13:9, Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5, Jam. 4:2)

Back to Bible study ideas, I also like to look up the meaning and other usages of the original Hebrew words of the Old Testament and Greek words of the New Testament on BibleHub.com. It can really help tie it all together when you see which other verses used the same words. Bible software programs are very handy for this—one that you might like to try is WORDsearch. They have a basic edition that works just fine for FREE, and it comes with the ESV translation, which I generally like. Just beware that (as the more expensive software programs do,) they do sell add-on material modules that are not at all helpful, but might even lead astray. Sadly, the various translation versions have also changed many words—they still MEAN the same thing, but if you use your Bible software to look them up, it can be frustrating. You KNOW the word was used in the verse you’re looking for, but the search results come up empty. Fortunately, you should be able to do a search that includes multiple translations of the Bible and find it that way. Sometimes Google is the best way to find a particular verse if all else fails.

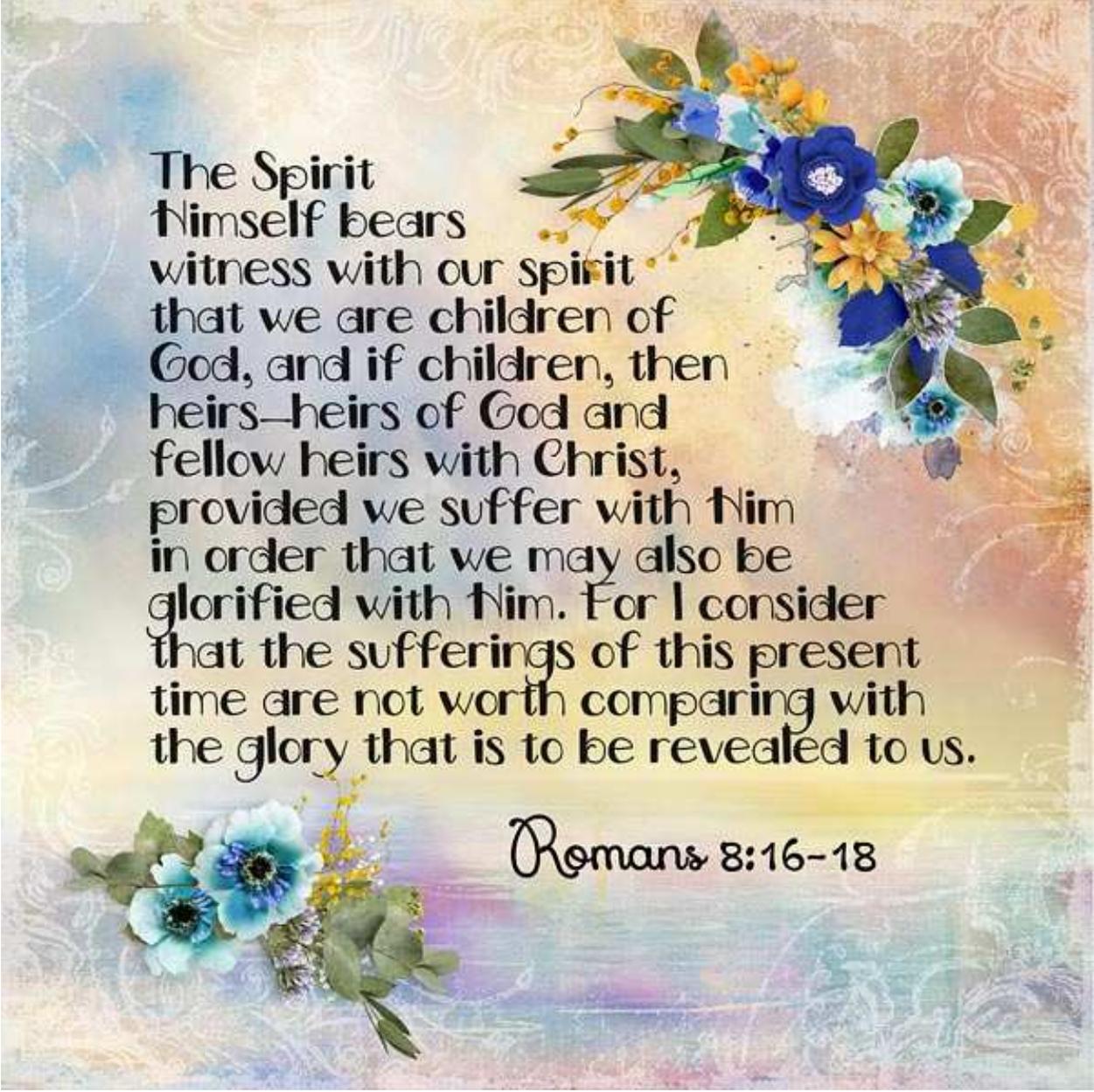
Another way to make Bible study more interesting is to look up the meanings of names of people and places. I often use Abarim-Publications.com for this (however, again, I disagree with some of their views—so I’m not giving a blanket approval to every single thing on their site). They have mostly Hebrew (Old Testament) names, but they also have some Greek. They break down the parts of the name in the original language and list other usages of those same parts of the word, etc. Another suggestion for personal Bible reading time is to pick a topic to study. One example would be going over all of the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament, which is an utterly awe-inspiring study that will definitely develop a deeper knowledge of and love for God. There are many lists of those prophecies online, some of them more

complete than others. Also, I have enjoyed many of the studies at JesusPlusNothing.com, and PreceptAustin.org is another popular Bible study site. Just try to avoid getting caught up in disputes over positions on matters that don't affect salvation. The Bible tells us not to get into vain arguments, and not to devour one another. (1Tim. 1:5-11, 2Tim. 2:24-26, Titus 1:7-16, 2:7-8, 1Pet. 3:15-16, Jam. 3:1, Gal. 5:15, Eph. 4:25-32)

You can make your own daily Bible reading plan for free at this site: MyBiblePlans.com. It will let you choose any starting date instead of only the beginning of a year, whether you want both Old and New Testaments or only one or the other, which books of each testament, how long you want the plan to last, etc. You can also return there daily to read that day's portion of the plan in the ESV translation. The site is run by a single person who recommends just skipping any parts that you miss in order to keep going. I understand why he says that (so that people won't just get too far behind and quit), but for myself, I think it would be better to just keep going by letting the end date extend and actually read the whole Bible if that was the goal. If parts are skipped, they actually CAN make the rest of the Bible harder to understand. My opinion is that it's better to be thorough than to meet a set deadline and have gaps. For me the goal is to know God better, not to be able to say I read the whole Bible (especially not if I have actually skipped parts). I have found that sometimes the people who boast reading the entire Bible the most times seem to actually KNOW God the least (based on their words, attitudes and behavior). That's incredibly SAD.

Which leads me to my next point—God WILL help us in our time of need if we truly love Him and put all of our trust and hope in Him. (1John 5:18-19, Heb. 2:18, 4:16, 7:25, Rom. 16:25-27, Eph. 3:20-21, Jude 1:24-25, Rom. 14:4, 10-12, 17-19 - this is about Christian service to glorify God, not about sin - see 1Cor. 5:12-13, 1Thess. 4:1-8, Col. 3:5-10, 1Cor. 6:9-20, Eph. 5:3-12, Heb. 10:26-39, 1John 2:1-6.) But we do need to actually BELIEVE that He is able and willing. (Jam. 1:5-7, 2-4) And we can also help one another. (Heb. 10:24-25, Gal. 6:1, Jude 1:23, Rom. 14:19, Jam. 5:19-20, 2Tim. 2:24-26, 2Cor. 12:19-13:5, 2Cor. 13:10, 1Cor. 14:12, 26, Eph. 4:11-32, Dan. 12:3) Let's make this a priority. We'll be glad we did!

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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. For I consider
that the sufferings of this present
time are not worth comparing with
the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:16-18

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