

## Conversations

by Tricia Berg

I would like to (anonymously) share conversations that I recently had with fellow believers about sharing the truth with others so that we can use this opportunity to examine what the Bible says about the matter. Both of these instances included women who have absolutely beautiful hearts for God—they are saved and show it by loving the lost and seeking to bring them to Christ, and also by loving fellow believers. We are each called by God to serve a particular purpose according to His will, and they are doing so. (Rom. 12, 14, 1Cor. 12:4-13:7, Eph. 4) As I've often said before, believers don't judge one another's service to God. We judge sin out of LOVE for the Body of Christ, with the hopes of restoring wayward believers to fellowship upon repentance. (Eph. 4:11-32, Matt. 18:15-17, 2Pet. 1:9, Phil. 3:18-19, 1Cor. 5, 2Cor. 2:6-8) It's important that we don't stray to either side of the narrow path—neither into trying to earn salvation by “keeping the law,” nor into permissiveness and tolerance of deliberate, persistent sin by God's children.

My purpose in sharing various Scriptures with them was NOT to judge their service as lacking or to accuse them of sin (on the contrary—not at all!), but to remind them of these passages that so many professed believers today are ignoring (because in general, people dislike hearing anything with which they disagree, and none of us likes to offend people and be treated like we're bigots.) (Luke 7:23, 9:26) The “ministry” (if you will) of this blog (Clothe Yourselves) has an aim of helping those who say they believe, but might have been deceived in these “times of difficulty” (as Paul called them) into thinking that Jesus doesn't expect to be obeyed, but that “good intentions” (which can amount to empty words of faith) are enough—that God is satisfied with the crumbs of our lives. (1John 2:26-29) I realize that people who have bought into these lies are probably not interested in what I have to say, but perhaps someone they know will feel equipped by the Scripture-filled messages on this blog to help them address these issues.

This first discussion is from when I wrote to someone who feels that we should not “push people away from Christ” (or “block them from ‘seeing Him’ by ‘standing in their way’”) by talking about right and wrong according to the Bible (in other words, sin). She says that only Jesus knows why people do the things they do. True enough, but it's also true that we are good at making excuses for our ungodly behavior. What we do shows the condition of our heart—lost people need to be made into new creations (2Cor. 5:17, but also see v. 14-15); saved people need to be transformed from within. (Rom. 12:1-2)

*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 (Also Psa. 19:7-14, esp. vv. 12-13)*

*And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23*

This sister in the Lord likes the quote: "People don't care what we say unless they believe we care." Also true, but if there's "a train coming" (and there is, for those who don't know God and refuse to humble themselves and submit to Him), then we should speak the truth frankly. There's not always time to build a relationship with someone first—how do any of us know how much time anyone has left to accept or reject the Word of Truth? "Get off the train tracks" is a universal message that applies to every person who is outside of God's will (which is first to believe, then to obey). (John 6:40, 1Thess. 4:3-8)

After we have placed our trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, we begin following Him, walking with Him. We must each examine ourselves for fruits of the Spirit, because they reveal whether or not we really believe in the one, true God as He IS (not as we prefer Him to be). (2Cor. 13:5 - this is part of a discussion in 1Cor. 12-13, esp. vv. 12:19-13:14 about their failure to repent. They even question Paul's motives and authority! He tells them that he dislikes being harsh with them, but has no choice due to their disobedience—which is out of their arrogance. They apparently think they're "special" because of the gifts God bestowed upon them, and therefore, don't need to be obedient.) In order to compare our fruits with those of the Spirit, we need to know what they are (according to HIS perfect will - Gal. 5:13-25, Rom. 12); and that God is not pleased with those who claim to be in the faith, but whose overall fruits (attitudes, words, actions) deny it. If those who are mature in Christ shy away from the "unpleasant" parts of the Bible (e.g. "stop sinning!" - 1Cor. 15:34), new believers will still be partially in the dark. (2Cor. 4:1-11)

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He didn't tell them to soft-pedal the message in order to make it more palatable to the lost. (Matt. 10:5-15, Luke 10:1-16) Those who were fed when He multiplied the loaves and fishes also received a healthy dose of the truth, not just a "happy meal." (Mark 6:34-44, John 6:25-27) We're not meant to be "gongs" (1Cor. 13:1-3) or hypocritical (Rom. 2), but it's not really being honest with people if we lead them to believe that God

expects NOTHING from His children (who are saved by the precious blood of Jesus alone)—no love, no respect, no obedience of any kind? Once again: To KNOW Him is to LOVE and be thankful to Him. To LOVE Him and show gratitude is to trust and OBEY Him. It's simple, but not easy. We fight daily to keep our old sinful nature dead (where it belongs) and live to Christ. (Gal. 2:20, Luke 9:23, Col. 3, 1Cor. 9:24-27, 1Tim. 6:11-12, 2Tim. 4:7, Eph. 6:10-20)

This lovely lady to whom I wrote the message below feels called to reach out to hurting people who need Jesus (and that is a wonderful thing), but she refers to them all as "children of God." The problem is that either people have not yet accepted the free gift of salvation, OR they are saved children of God who need the help of mature believers to grow up into Christ. I'm not suggesting that anyone should deal with the sin of an individual in social media. Issues specific to a particular believer should be dealt with privately to help them get back on the narrow path. (Gal. 6:1, Jam. 5:19-20) Public shaming is NOT of God (except if a rebuke is necessary as a last resort—not in social media for all to see, but in person, before the local congregation—in order to rein in a rebellious soul, and to keep the rest of the "sheep" from being led astray by them - Jam. 1:19-20, 1Tim. 5:20, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2, 1Tim. 4:16, 2Cor. 11:3, 2Pet. 2:12-22). However, avoiding the topic of sin altogether in public messages, which could reach unbelievers, mature believers and everyone in between, is not helpful. I'm certainly not suggesting that every message should be about sin, or that we should beat people over the head with the Bible, but sin is a heart issue—our behavior reflects who or what is first in our lives, and that should always be God for believers.

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“Your sincere heart for God and genuine desire to reach people with His love is a noble cause. Could I share some thoughts without hurting your feelings or discouraging you (or making you feel criticized and defensive)? I really wouldn't want to do that to a beautiful sister in Christ. That said, I feel that any "baby Christians" who are listening might apply what you say to themselves—they might interpret it that no one should help them grow up into Jesus, the Head of the Body of Christ, which is done by maturing in their faith, which naturally affects their behavior. The mature are meant to help the immature in that way. (Titus 2:1-10, Heb. 5:11-14, Phil. 3:15-19, 1Cor. 2:6-16)

We are living in the days about which Paul warned Timothy. (2Tim. 3:1-5, 2Tim. 4:1-5) People consider truth to be "hate speech." (Gal. 4:16-18) But as you know, we are called to speak the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15-24) "Christ in

you" means a LOT more than most people these days are being led to believe (often by profit-seeking wolves in sheep's clothing). Jesus bears good, visible fruit. (Titus 2:11-15, Gal. 5:16-25, John 15:1-10)

Our old sinful nature LOVES to receive permission to continue doing the same sins as we did before we were "saved." But if the Holy Spirit is present inside of us, then we are His temple and we are making Him an "accessory to our crimes" when we deliberately disobey God. (Not a good thing, as I'm sure you agree.) (Heb. 12, 1Cor. 3:16-17, 1Cor. 6:17-20, Rom. 12:1-2, 1Thess. 4:7-8)

I know you were talking about our attitude towards unbelievers, but there is a growing trend (especially in mega-churches, which is how they grow that big) to refuse to talk about sin. Jesus loves you "as you are" AND "you can stay that way" instead of the Holy Spirit transforming believers into the image of Christ from the inside out.

It's true that we can't police the world, but it's wrong how, through their behavior, many professed members of the Body today are both joining in and encouraging sin. (1Cor. 5:12-13, Rom. 1:32, Jude, 2Pet. 2) If only someone would tell them that they are defiling the holy, pure, precious Body of our Lord—but I'm afraid they wouldn't listen, and the ones who have their "ear" would never say anything that might cause them to leave (along with their numbers for the "success stats" and their dollars). (Jesus repeatedly spoke to those "with an ear to hear" "what the Spirit says" in the His letters to the churches of Rev. 2 and 3.)

People who listen to others tell them what they like to hear instead of heeding the Spirit's prompting and convicting are grieving and quenching Him. (Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) That is dangerous, since He is the giver of the free gift of saving faith. (John 6:63, Eph. 2:8-10, Heb. 3:12-14)

I couldn't agree with you more that arguing, name-calling, fury and so forth are NOT pleasing to God. (Eph. 4:25-32, 2Tim. 2:22-26) And as you said, we can't make anyone believe. Neither can we make anyone obey Jesus (which is the same thing as LOVING Him - John 14:15-26). The way that we live our lives does matter, as you said. We must love in word AND deed. (1John 3:16-18)

I think it comes down to our audience (which we can't really control in online venues, and so it's important to keep in mind when preparing what to say on any given topic). Just as we can't force anyone to accept our message, we aren't to blame if someone stumbles over the truth once we have presented it in the most loving way possible (and have not made hypocrites of ourselves in

doing so - Rom. 2:1-11, Matt. 7:3-5). We have to continue being the salt and light even when people won't accept the truth. (Matt. 5:13-16, 1John 4:5-6)

Please don't take this note the wrong way. Each of us has to be sensitive to God's leading in their service to Him. None of us should think we know everything and have been put in charge of everyone else. (Rom. 14) I think you're a wonderful person, serving God from your heart. I just wanted to share these thoughts so that you can be careful not to fall into any trap (as people often are sadly prone to do) where they are worried about pleasing people (i.e. seeming "nice" being more important than lovingly telling the whole truth that people so desperately need to hear, even though they dislike it). (Acts 20:22-31, Gal. 1:10)

I cry every time I read about the five foolish virgins who were not allowed into the kingdom of God—they thought they would be! (Matt. 5:1-13) They started out with lamps and oil, but they were careless, which was foolish. Jesus also used the terms "wise" and "foolish" in Matt. 7:21-29 about those who hear AND do His will (or sadly, hear and do not obey), and how again, some will not enter the kingdom despite expecting to do so.

You quoted Col. 4:5-6 in support the idea that we need to make sure our time with family and friends is enjoyable instead of "picking arguments by insisting upon being right," but it says "toward outsiders." In my mind the following passages all go along with each other.

***Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Colossians 4:5-6***

***"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***

***Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise***

***but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:11-17***

We can't force anyone to care about this so that they want to get ready for Jesus' return and love Him with all their heart—but if we who know the truth don't try to warn them that God isn't pleased with this self-centered, sinful world, then who will? (Heb. 10:23-39, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-5) Peter gave a list of qualities to make a practice of in order to give us comfort and assurance that we would be granted entry into the kingdom (unlike the five foolish virgins who let their lamps go out). (2Pet. 2:3-15)

Peter also warned us (like Paul did) that there would be false teachers who would twist the Bible. (2Pet. 3:14-18) So since we know this and we do have the truth and don't twist it, what a shame it would be if we keep it to ourselves, right? Personally, I refuse to take the chance of being salt that has lost its saltiness (Luke 14:34-35, Mark 9:50) or a light hidden (which is like one who hides their talent or mina - Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27). I'm not saying that you are doing that, but I'm just encouraging you to use caution so that listeners don't get the mistaken impression that the way to eternal life is broad. (Matt. 7:13-20, Luke 13:22-30)

Again, PLEASE do not feel discouraged, hurt or criticized. You are loved and appreciated.

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This next conversation is the continuation by email of a discussion that began on the phone, but was interrupted. This believer (who is related to me) is deeply concerned (as am I) for our unsaved family members. Some of them are not responding to her efforts to "love them as they are." Even though she never mentions sin to them at all, they are still avoiding her. I told her that is most likely because they have become accustomed to the darkness, so the light makes them feel uncomfortable. (John 3:19-21, Eph. 5:1-21, Matt. 5:13-16) They were raised to believe in and obey God, so their consciences convict them, but they suppress and resist His Spirit and the truth ("harden their hearts"). (Acts 7:51, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19-22, John 14:15-17, Rom. 1:18, 1Tim. 6:18-21, 2Tim. 2:14-26, Heb. 3:12-14) These loved ones see that people who claim to be believers are blending in with the world these days, and that more and more "churches" are affirming many sinful behaviors. They choose to listen to those offering "cheap grace" (or even "universal grace"—no faith required) instead of remembering what they were previously taught—which is that those

who believe in Jesus follow Him. (2Tim. 3:12-17, Luke 14:33-35, Matt. 10:37-39)

I started out by clarifying a comment I made right before the call was cut short (due to another important call coming in) about the church not being a building (not one made with human hands). (Eph. 2:19-22, 1Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10, Heb. 3:5-6, Col. 2:9-12, 1Cor. 3:16-17) My point is that American believers have been referring to buildings (into which a LOT of time, money and effort is invested) as "churches" for a LONG time—but too many think that "membership" at that particular place or regular attendance of services there makes them a Christian even though they don't follow Jesus the rest of the time. There was indeed a "flock" under the care of shepherds (also called elders - 1Pet. 5, 1Tim. 3), but the only enrollment kept that I know of was of the true widows (and probably other needy so as to not be overlooked.) (1Tim. 5:3-16, Acts 6:1-6)

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“You were saying that without the church building, there would be no place to hear the sermons—but the early church met in homes and each believer contributed to the service, not just one pastor. (Rom. 16:5, 1Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Philemon 1:2, Acts 2:2, 5:42, 10:22, 12:12, 20:20, 1Cor. 14:26, Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5) That's why I say that your small group is similar to the early church. You meet regularly to pray, sing praises, learn together, share one another's burdens, share a meal, etc. (all that might be missing is helping the poor and needy, assuming each member reaches out to the unsaved by sharing the Gospel). (Note: She replied by email that their group saves up money to donate to the needy, so even this "base" is covered by their group's activities. Praise God!) Elders were appointed to lead each congregation, and the person ("apostle," as in "sent one," not as in one of the twelve) who planted the church would come back as often as he could to check that their teachings were solid, what questions or issues might have come up, etc., but he kept moving and planting more churches.

So I'm not saying that it's not "allowed" to do things the way they are done now, but just that it isn't how it was originally. We have all just accepted it from our own longstanding traditions that things are done in this way. Churches are being run like businesses with the overhead of office space, an emphasis on attractive and comfortable buildings, furnishings, etc. and like I said, it has led to the mind-set that people come and go "to and from church" instead of BEING the church ALL of the time. Likely the underground church in China survives partly due to the lack of a permanent building, since they are a moving target.

About what we were discussing on being in Christ, Jesus taught in the Parable of the Sower that many believe for a while, then fall away due to the cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches, etc. People who have fallen away are not abiding in Him (John 15:1-10), but He does welcome them back if they return—just like the prodigal who wanted to spend his inheritance on worthless, temporary, worldly "pleasures and treasures." (Luke 15:11-32) It says in Heb. 3:12-14 that we need to be careful not to fall away from the living God due to the deceitfulness of sin, and to hold fast until the end. (The problem isn't that Jesus will "lose His grasp on us," but that if we love our sin more than God, we will quench the Spirit, who is the giver of the free gift of faith. Eph. 2:8-10, Rom. 10:17)

*"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

*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.** Hebrews 3:12-14 (Also v. 6.)*

So we need to continue doing good whether it seems to make a difference or not, since we're working for Jesus, not people. He alone saves, we share the message and make disciples of those who accept it, by teaching through both word and living example (including loving even our enemies - Rom. 12:9-21, Matt. 5:43-48, 1Pet. 3:9-17 - and holding fast to God throughout trials - Jam. 1:12, 5:10-11, 1Pet. 1:6-9).

People who claim to be believers (especially if they're not new to the faith), but show no fruits of the Spirit need a wake-up call. (Gal. 5:16-25, 2Thess. 5:4-8, Mark 13:33-37, Matt. 26:41, Matt. 25:1-13, John 15:1-10) As we talked about, people are being deceived into trading in their "firstborn inheritance" for the

same things that unbelievers value, but those will all pass away. (1John 2:15-17) God disciplines those He loves, but if they will not heed Him then that's their choice. That's why today's wishy-washy teachings that Jesus is our "buddy" are so dangerous, because the result is people who don't feel they need to respect and obey their LORD - but that's how we show our belief is truly in our hearts. (Rom. 10:8-10, Acts 2:36, 1Pet. 3:15, Mark 7:6-9, John 4:19-24, John 14:15-26, Titus 2:11-15, Rom. 6, 8, Col. 3, Jam. 1:22-27, 2:8-26, Rom. 13:8-14)

*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:23-25*

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:1-10*

*Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to **wake from sleep**. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.** Romans 13:11-14*

*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. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:1-17 (The church of the firstborn is mentioned later in the same chapter.)*

*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 (Also 1Cor. 9:24-27)

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, 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. 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 3:1-24 (Also 1John 1:5-2:6)**

There are getting to be more and more false teachers saying that repentance has nothing to do with salvation, so that's not helping make disciples who FOLLOW Jesus instead of just giving Him the lip service of fake faith. But Paul warned about what the end times would be like. Peter also said that people would twist Paul's writings and the rest of the Bible. So this is to be expected. We put on the full armor of God in order to stand firm in our faith. (Eph. 6:10-20)

The warnings not to judge are for sins we DO ourselves (as in make a practice of without repenting), not that since we have all sinned, then no one can ever talk about sin. That's a trick of the devil to get people to stand by and do nothing (or even help him) as he destroys the holiness of the Body of Christ. (1 Cor. 5, Matt. 18:15-17, Rom. 2:1-11, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, 1Cor. 15:33-34, 1Cor. 6:17-20, 1Thess. 4:1-8, 1Pet. 4:1-5, 2Pet. 2, Jude) The men who wanted to stone the woman for adultery were literally going to kill her. Not only that, they were being hypocrites, because they were NOT going to stone the man caught with her, with was required by the law they claimed to be upholding. (John 8:1-11, Deut. 22:24, Matt. 9:13, Jam. 2:8-13, Matt. 7:1-5)

*But understand this, that **in the last days there will come times of difficulty**. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.** 2 Timothy 3:1-5*

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.** As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:1-5*

*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness**, waiting for and hastening the*

*coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, **be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which **the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:11-18***

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My intention is not to tell everyone that they need to serve God in the same way as I do—definitely not—Jesus is the Head of the Church. (Eph. 1:22-23) However, this goes in both directions. It saddens me when people treat me as though I am being a “hater” because I am serving in the way that God has called me to do. He put in my heart the desire to help believers be ready for Jesus’ return. He knows that I care more about the eternal souls of those who are deceived than about my own comfort level, so I will tell them the unpopular truth. I believe what God said when He inspired the writings of those lists of practices that will keep a person who refuses to repent of them OUT of the kingdom of God. (1Cor. 6:9-11—such WERE some of you doesn’t mean that we “pretend” to be “clean” even if we are STILL filthy, as evidenced by our unrepentant behavior; Gal. 5:16-21, Rev. 21:8, 22:15, Matt. 3:8, 2Cor. 13:5, Rom. 8:9, 13;14, Gal. 5:24)

Faith without works is dead, just like the body without the spirit is dead. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives those who are saved new spiritual LIFE that visibly changes them (sometimes with miraculous speed, but usually in a gradual process). If there is no progress toward being Christ-like (but mostly bad fruit), there is no evidence that He is THERE. (Jam. 2:14-26, 1:21-27, Matt. 7:13-29) This is not a game, but if it were, then reassuring people with no fruits of the Spirit (or even any desire to change) that they are saved would be like playing Russian Roulette with souls.

Our “enemies” are not supposed to be our fellow believers. (Gal. 5:13-15) We’re supposed to be standing firm WITH each other against the outside,

deceived world—not letting the wolves in sheep’s clothing not only get IN, but to RUN the church! (Mark 3:24-25, Acts 20:26-31, 2Tim. 6:3-16, 2Pet. 2:1-3, Jude 1:3-4) We’re to keep OUT the leaven, so let’s do that. (1Cor. 5:6-8) Let’s not cooperate with Satan as he leads God’s people into idolatry and other sins—just like he has always done, ever since the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3, 1Cor. 10:6-14, 1Cor. 11:1-4, 1John 5:18-20)

The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. (Luke 12:1) They held power over the people as religious leaders (even adding picky details to God’s statutes - Matt. 23, Prov. 30:6), but they didn’t obey Him themselves. It might not be exactly the same these days, but it is definitely still being hypocritical when respected teachers and preachers get rich and famous telling believers that God is unconcerned about the behavior (good or bad) of His children. Greed and worldliness are the fruits of the indwelling Spirit? Jesus suffered and died for our sins so that we could continue to live in them? He wants us to put all of our hope in our worldly life and to value earthly riches more than heavenly ones? Think again. (Rom. 6, Matt. 6) That’s just as much “another gospel” or “different Jesus” as reverting to the law for salvation. (Gal. 1:6-10, 1Cor. 11:3-4, 1John 2:26-29) We need to STOP listening to them and supporting them by “liking” their social media pages, donating to their “ministries,” buying their books and videos, etc. We must believe what GOD said rather than showing favoritism to those we like, despite their contradicting Him. (1Tim. 6:3-21)

*The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all **wicked deception** for those who are perishing, because they **refused to love the truth and so be saved**. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had **pleasure in unrighteousness**. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12*

There are also some false teachers today who want to force all believers to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, food restrictions, feasts, etc. (but there is no temple in Jerusalem, where males were required to go three times a year—and in Christ, there is no Jew, Gentile, female, male, free, slave—Gal.3:28-29—WE are the temple and Jesus Himself is our Sabbath if we are IN Him—Eph. 2:14-22). We need to avoid being carried away by those errors as well. (Col. 2:16-23, 4:10-11, Rom. 14:5-8—all God-given freedoms are to be enjoyed to His glory, with thanks.) Read ALL of Gal. 3-5—they were falsely being told they had to be physically circumcised (Rom. 2:28-29), which I don’t think anyone is telling that to believers today. However, if we are “children of the free woman” then we are not slaves to sin, either. (John 8:34-36, Rom. 6:15-19, 2Pet. 2:18-22, 1Cor. 6:9-20)

Generally, it is more profitable (in terms of money for greedy people) to tell people what they really love hearing: that they can “have their cake and eat it, too” (i.e. sin all they want in this life, even after they should know better IF they truly believe and God dwells IN them, and still enter the kingdom of God—no worries!) But the truth is that our desires change when we are genuinely born again. (Phil. 2:12-16) Sinful things that we used to think of as fun are no longer so, because they displease and reflect badly on our God, whose name we bear as “Christians” (disciples of Christ). (Rom. 6:20-23, 2Pet. 1:4, 2Pet. 3:3, Jude 1:16) We obey His commands, which are not burdensome because we LOVE Him and are grateful for what He has done for us. (Mark 12:28-34, John 15:12-17, 1John 5:3, 2Cor. 5:14-15) We seek HIS glory above ALL things, because HE ALONE is worthy. (Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10, 1Thess. 2:12, Phil. 1:27, Rom. 8:16-17, Rev. 3:4) **Amen.**

*Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!**” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “**Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.**” Revelation 4:4-11*

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