

## Do You Love Me?

by Tricia Berg

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me** more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me**?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me**?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." John 21:15-17*

As we know, in the above passage Peter reaffirms his love for Jesus the same number of times that he recently denied even knowing Him. (Matt. 26:33-35, Matt. 26:69-75) The Greek word that Jesus uses the first two times is agape. This is the same word that is used in Matthew 24:12 - "because of lawlessness (sin - 1John 3:4), the love (agape) of many will grow cold." Peter answers Jesus using a form of the Greek word "philo" which is more of an affection or fondness than the deep devotion you need to give up your life for someone else. (John 13:1) (But Jesus alludes to the fact that Peter will indeed give up his life for the sake of His Savior. - John 21:18-19) This is the same word used in Rev. 3:19 - "as many as I love (philo), I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent!" (Jesus also uses this word the third time He questions Peter above.)

Notice that Jesus required something from Peter. He didn't say "Okay, your verbal confession is good enough for me—what more could I ask for?" He expected Peter to SHOW his love for Him by DOING what He told him to do, BECAUSE of that love. (Eph. 2:10, John 15:8) Was Jesus telling Peter he needed to earn his own salvation? NO! But nevertheless, Jesus had expectations of Peter, and so does He have them of US—that is, IF we LOVE Him. (1Cor. 2:9, Jam. 1:12, Jam. 2:5, Heb. 6:9-12) We are servants of the Lord—what has yet to be seen is what KIND of servants we are (hopefully good and faithful!) (Col. 3:23-25, Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27, Psa. 45:10-11, Matt. 10:37-39) We know by his writings and the Book of Acts that Peter faithfully followed up on his promise, as did John and the other apostles.

*A new commandment I give to you, that you **love** [agapate] **one another: just as I have loved you**, you also are to love [agapate] one another. By this*

all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love [agapēn] for one another." John 13:34-35

If you read any of the messages I write on this blog (and my other blog: [Clothe Yourselves](#)), then you will have already been referred to John 14 and 15 repeatedly. Jesus has two expectations of us, and we can't do the second one without doing the first. (Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-10, Matt. 7:12, Jam. 2:8)

**"If you love [agapate] 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 [agapōn] me. And he who loves [agapōn] me will be loved [agapēthēsetai] by my Father, and I will love [agapēsō] 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 [agapa] me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love [agapēsei] him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **Whoever does not love [agapōn] 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." John 14:15-26

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved [ēgapēsen] me, so have I loved [ēgapēsa] you. **Abide in my love [agapē]. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love [agapē], just as I have kept my Father's commandments and****

**abide in his love** [agapē]. *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you **love** [agapate] **one another as I have loved** [ēgapēsa] **you**. Greater **love** [agapēn] has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will **love** [agapate] **one another**." John 15:1-17*

Another thing my readers know is that "love" does NOT mean "anything goes." Jesus will be judging His own FIRST. We don't "clean ourselves up" before coming to Him, but we DO yield to HIS cleaning us up AFTER we come to Him. People who were healed by Jesus were instructed NOT to go back to their old ways. (John 5:14, John 8:11) We're NEW creations. (2Cor. 5:17, Rom. 6:4) He shed His precious blood to wash us clean. We're to CARE about that and WANT to stay cleansed. (1John 1:5-2:6)

*Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought **to walk and to please God**, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that **no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you**. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to **love one another**, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to **do this more and more**, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12*

*How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "**The***

***Lord will judge his people.*** "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:29-31

Also read the greater context of Heb. 10:26-39. We would all agree that those who are not saved have NOT been sanctified by the blood. See Heb. 6:4-8. Again, those who have not been saved have NOT shared in the Spirit. Some people say that Hebrews was written ONLY "to" the Hebrews. I have a problem with that. For one, it doesn't say that anywhere in the book/letter. The title of the book was assigned because SOME manuscripts said "To the Hebrews" on the outside of the scroll. To me, that would be like saying that since we're not Romans, then we don't need to pay heed to the book of Romans. Some people say that "the Hebrews" (addressed on the outside of the letter) were still trying to save themselves by offering sacrifices, and the point was to get them to stop. But it doesn't say "if we continue *offering sacrifices*, they are not effective" (even though that is TRUE), it says "if we continue *sinning deliberately*, there is no further sacrifice for sin." Continuing to offer sacrifices would be just one of many ways to continue sinning deliberately.

The warning that Jesus died for us ONCE (i.e. we can only be "born again/born from above" ONCE) goes along with Heb. 6:4-8—what happens to those who fall away from the living God and bear thorns and thistles instead of good fruit. (Matt. 7:21-29) (Needless to say, we can't "fall away" from a God we never knew in the first place.) Jesus is not going to be crucified for them again after He already sanctified them by His blood once, but they turned back. (Heb. 9:24-27) This goes along with Heb. 3:12-15 and 1Pet. 2:11. We mustn't harden our hearts against God in favor of the world and our old sinful, fleshly desires. We are NOT "lost" because we slip or because we fail to always perfectly prioritize our faith every single day. Hardening our hearts is a gradual process that if left uncorrected, can result in no longer even believing, because the Holy Spirit's voice has been thoroughly quenched. (Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) A person who no longer believes is not saved—and this is important—they simply don't care anymore. You'll often see them actively working against God, even if claiming to be spreading "the truth." Faith comes by HEARING (Rom. 10:17), but we all know people who refuse to listen. They have hard hearts. (Eph. 4:18-19) They want their own way, not God's. It comes down to their unwillingness to humble themselves and SUBMIT to Him. (Rom. 8:7, 10:3, Jam. 4:7)

You can believe what you like, but I believe that these warnings are for ALL BELIEVERS. Also see Heb. 4:12-13, 1Cor. 9:24-13, Phil. 3:8-21, 1John 2:24-3:24, Rev. 2:21-23. Jesus said that some would only believe for a while in the Parable of the Sower. (Mark 4) That's why we're to ABIDE in Him (which is to follow Him, not merely make an easy confession of faith and go on our merry

way). We can refer back again to John 14-15 to find out HOW to abide in Him. It's simple, but not easy. We must LOVE—NOT "keep the law" (meaning the letter of it), but keep the SPIRIT of the law (Rom. 7:4-6, Eph. 2:15, Gal. 5:1), which is LOVE, BY the Spirit (who is IN us). And contrary to the beliefs of apostate (fallen away from the truth) churches these days, "love" doesn't participate in or affirm sexual immorality. (1Thess. 4:1-8, 1Cor. 6:9-20, Gal. 5:13-26, Eph. 4:17-5:33) "Love" does NOT equal "sex." You CAN "love whomever you want to, but you can NOT have sex with whomever you want to—at least not if you want to please God. But if you don't care what He thinks, then you have bigger, more lasting (eternal) problems...

This is not meant to cause panic, but to remind us of the unfathomable, undeserved blessing we believers have received to be adopted as children of God. (John 1:12-13) It's not something to take for granted, but to treasure and value above everything in the entire world. We're warned not to be like Esau, who placed his immediate desires above his future, valuable firstborn inheritance. (Heb. 12:14-29, also see 1John 2:15-17) Can we possibly claim to know and love God and yet not RESPECT Him and His ways? I don't think so, and the Bible says such people are LYING when they claim to know God. (1John 1:5-2:6—remember, we're not under the Old Covenant law, but the spirit of the law does not mean a free for all, either. See Rom. 5-6.)

***For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:3-5***

*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God;** and if it **begins with us**, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator **while doing good.** 1 Peter 4:16-19*

***He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the***

Greek, but **glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good**, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. Romans 2:6-11

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the **time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.**" Revelation 11:18

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be **revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will **receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.** 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (Note, the passages that follow this passage have already been quoted above - we are His temple, and we mustn't be deceived by the "wisdom" of men who say that we have been set "free" to sin against God. We are set free FROM sin's power to control us. Again, Rom. 6.)

"Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'" **Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." Malachi 3:13-18 (This regards the end times—see Mal. 4:1-3.)**

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

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **a people for his own possession**, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to **abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.** 1 Peter 2:9-12*

*"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*

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

*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*

Satan is hell-bent on defiling God's temple, and that is us in this age of mystery where Christ dwells in His body, the Church (believing Jews and even Gentiles - Acts 10:45). (Eph. 3:6, Col. 1:27, Rom. 8:9) So it's no surprise that sexual immorality is running rampant these days, even among professed believers. It shows the (incredibly shocking and sad) effectiveness of Satan's war against God. Contrary to what modern society would have us believe, the following passage doesn't say that God "made them that way" and so their sin "can't be

sin." It says THREE times that He "gave them up" to the evil that was in their wicked hearts. Jesus already explained that evil comes from inside of us. (Mark 15:16-20, Matt. 12:33-37) Telling people that God loves being called a liar is WRONG. He said He made male and female, and that marriage is between a man and a woman. (Gen. 1:27, 2:24, Matt. 19:4-6)

Note: It is IRRELEVANT that the topic was divorce, not homosexuality, in the passage from Matthew. Jesus could have used gender-neutral pronouns if that was what He meant, but He DIDN'T—that would contradict the ENTIRE teaching of the rest of the Bible, which He inspired men to record for our benefit! And for those who like to twist the Bible to fit their own preferences, "There is no longer male or female" is SPIRITUAL, regarding SALVATION, not physical. (Gal. 3:28) God does NOT put anyone in the "wrong" body. Neither did He make anyone without gender—there are sometimes physical birth defects caused by sin ruining the world, but DNA testing will reveal each person's gender even in those rare cases.

*Therefore God **gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God **gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.** Romans 1:24-32***

Marriage is a physical pattern of the intimate relationship we have with God SPIRITUALLY—but our spirits are contained in our bodies, so if we sin against our bodies, then we sin against HIS TEMPLE. His Spirit in us produces fruit in a way that correlates to the union of a man and woman producing the "fruit" of a baby. No such "fruit" is produced by the "union" of people of the same gender. (Gal. 5:22-24, Rom. 6:22, Rom. 7:4-6, Phil. 1:9-11, Col. 1:9-10, John

15:4, Matt. 13:23, Mal. 2:15, Gen. 1:28) (Also see my article entitled "Do Not Be Deceived" for more on this topic.)

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

*Do you not know that you are **God's temple** and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and **you are that temple.** 1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

I have a very important question for you. Have you told Jesus that you love (agape) Him today? Next question: What have you done to SHOW Him that you are sincere in your declaration of love? A good place to start would be to BELIEVE what HE SAID over what misguided people say. (2Tim. 2:19-26, Gal. 6:7-9) The passage above continues as follows:

***Let no one deceive himself.** If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him **become a fool that he may become wise.** For **the wisdom of this world is folly with God.** For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 1 Corinthians 3:18-20*

*Now **we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.** And we impart this in words **not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit,** interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.** 1 Corinthians 2:12-14*

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must **obey God rather than men.**"  
Acts 5:29

"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 10:26-33

Don't follow people who are on the broad path to destruction! They DO NOT know the way! Follow Jesus! (Matt. 7:13-29, Matt. 16:24-27) Don't listen to puffed up false teachers telling you that most of the Bible doesn't apply to you and that God has absolutely no expectations of you except to "believe." Some preachers, teachers and self-appointed "prophets" and "apostles" who have become rich and famous deceiving the masses will hear from Jesus, "I never knew you." (Matt. 7:21-23) The truth is that IF we REALLY believe in our hearts (not ONLY confess with our mouths—Rom. 10:8-10), then the Spirit will empower us to desire to know and do God's will. (Gal. 5:16-25, Phil. 2:12-16) Again, it is NOT complicated! We are under "the law of liberty, the royal law, and the law of Christ." (Jam. 1:25, Jam. 2:12, Gal. 6:2) Our motive is love of God and of those He loves—fellow followers of Jesus are our family. (Mark 3:33-35, 1John 2:15-17, Rom. 12:4-5, 1Cor. 12:26-27, Eph. 4:25, Rom. 12:9-10, Gal. 5:13, Gal. 6:10, 1Thess. 4:9-10, Heb. 13:1, 1Pet. 1:22-23, 1Pet. 3:8-17, 2Pet. 1:5-12)

Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the **teaching that accords with godliness**, he is **puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.** 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 6:2-12

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

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

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because **your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing**. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your **steadfastness and faith** in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be **considered worthy of the kingdom of God**, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord

*Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12*

Jesus said to keep his words and commands (plural). He elaborated on what those were in the same discussions of John 14-15. He was not referring back to keeping the letter of the law of the OLD Covenant. He made it clear in Matt. 5 that the spirit of the law is actually harder to keep than the letter—if no one could even keep the letter of it, they certainly couldn't keep the spirit of it with their OWN power. (Gal. 3:11; also see Col. 2 and Rom. 14.) The reason John said that those who believe are the ones who overcome is that those who believe are the ones who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore set free from enslavement to sin, empowered by the Spirit within them to overcome. (John 8:31-36)

God doesn't force us to believe, love or obey. Don't ignore the part about showing love for God by keeping His commands. (1John 5:1-5, 1John 3:6-10, 1John 2:3-6, 1John 1:6, 2Cor. 5:14-15) We "purify ourselves" not merely by believing, as though God doesn't see if we disregard His instructions, but because we believe, we obey Him. (1John 3:3, keep reading—don't stop there! Also Heb. 12:14, 1Thess. 5:22, Rom. 16:17-19. Also see Acts 5:1-11.) I just can't stress enough that the narrow road is NEITHER law keeping NOR a license to sin.

We show what we're really like (a "good tree" or a "bad tree") when we make choices using our God-given free will. Most people these days are not accustomed to seeing passages with their context intact. False teachers love to cut short or twist verses in order to support their erroneous views. People don't even know they're being deceived, because they "don't have time" to look things up for themselves—they just trust someone else to tell them what it says. (But most of us have time for many unnecessary things, and no one can lead us astray unless we let them.)

*"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. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?** Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But*

*the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:43-49*

Another reference repeatedly made in my articles is to the letters of Revelation 2-3, which were given by Jesus, who sent His angel to tell His servants what must soon take place. (Rev. 1:1-3). Yes, the SAME Jesus people love to quote because He said "judge not." Pay attention to this phrase used over and over: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This indicates that this message is for believers (the Church), but not everyone will "hear," which is to receive (i.e. accept) the message. However, those who DO will receive the reward promised. The Spirit and the Bride say "come, drink" (of the free, living water), but they don't FORCE anyone to drink or to LOVE Jesus. (Rev. 22:17) After that verse is a warning for those who would add to or take away from the words of the book. We do NOT have permission to ignore God's warnings and teach others to do so as well, NOR to enforce our personal preferences in matters of freedom on others (which is not the same looking the other way while other believers sin so that they will do the same for us)! (Prov. 30:6, Matt. 5:19, Rom. 14, Acts 15:10, Matt. 18:15-17, John 7:24, Matt. 7:5) Saying that God doesn't mean what He says is NOT being loving. We're to speak the TRUTH in love. The opposite of "truth in love" would be "lies in hate." Let's not do that!

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the***

spirit of your minds, and to **put on the new self**, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. **Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths**, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:11-32

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

If we LOVE both God and people, then we will BELIEVE what God said and warn others that He is SERIOUS. If you think about it, Paul Revere would not have warned the colonists about the arrival of the British troops unless he BELIEVED the report (one lantern if by land, two if by sea), would He? So do we believe Jesus is returning or not? (2Pet. 3:1-7) The foolish virgins heard the midnight cry, but there wasn't time for them to replenish the depleted oil in their lamps. (Matt. 25:1-13) It really is easier just to go along with the flow, but God doesn't change with the times. (Heb. 13:8) If He did, we would be in trouble—then how could we trust Him to keep His word? (Mal. 3:6, Num. 23:19) The following words were ALSO of JESUS:

**The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Revelation 21:7-8

**Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. Revelation 22:14-15**

We do conquer by the blood of the Lamb, but ALSO by our testimony. (See those letters in Rev. 2-3 again for more illumination on how believers conquer.) Part of that testimony is the way we live our lives in such a way as to reflect well upon our Savior—not as the world who does not believe lives, but as though our Lord and Master is returning to judge our faithfulness during His absence—because HE IS! (Matt. 24:45-51)

*And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb **and by the word of their testimony**, for they **loved not their lives even unto death**. Revelation 12:11 (Remember Mark 8:34-38?)*

Those "with an ear to hear" must ACT upon what they hear - that is how they can be sure they "have an ear." (Jam. 1:22-25, John 8:37-44)

*To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their **ears** are uncircumcised, **they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it**. Jeremiah 6:10*

*And now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children **unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD**; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 30:8-11 (Also see 2Tim. 3:1-5, 2Tim. 4:1-5)*

*Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. **But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'**" I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, '**We will not pay attention.**' Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they **have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it**. Jeremiah 6:16-19 (Also see Isa. 42:18-20.)*

And by this we know that we have **come to know him**, if we keep his commandments. **Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him**, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked**. 1 John 2:3-6

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 4:6

Let's read our Bibles for ourselves so that we can stand before our Lord of lords and King of kings when the time comes knowing that we gave all we had for His sake, just as He deserves. (Rom. 13:14, Gal. 5:24, Eph. 5:1-21)

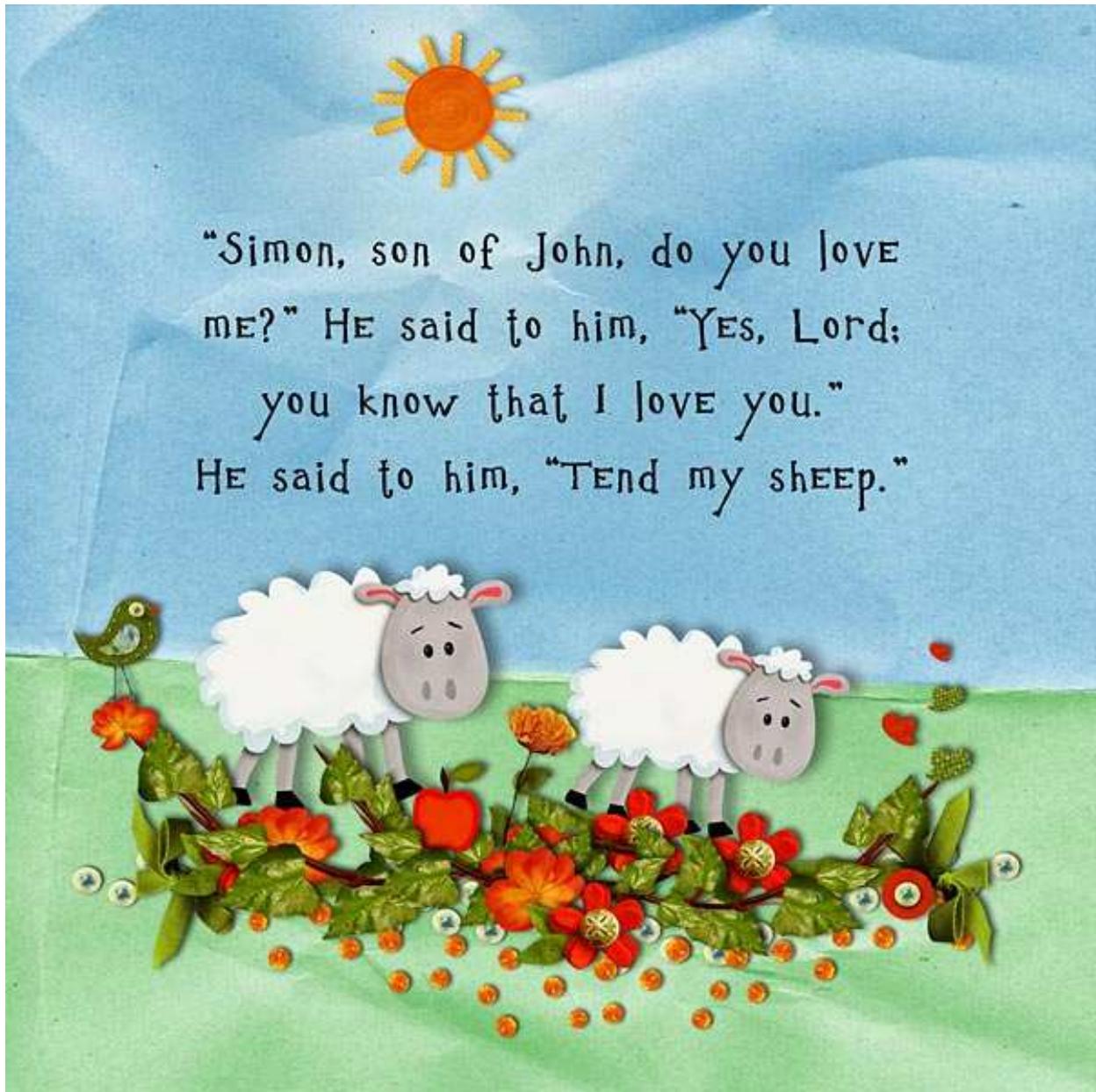
And now, little children, abide in him, **so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming**. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that **everyone who practices righteousness** has been born of him. 1 John 2:28-29

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. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the **judge of all**, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. **Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:1-29

Again, please note that the "Book of Hebrews" was not titled as such inside the original manuscript. Nevertheless, we know that Gentile believers in this age are being grafted in to the "cultivated olive tree" of Israel. The time will come when the "fullness of the Gentiles" has come in. Don't miss it, and don't be arrogant against the original branches (the Jews)! (Rom. 11:17-36 Also see Acts 21:25 and Rom. 14:5-8, 14.)

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