

## God's House

(For the Joy Set Before Him, and Us)

by Tricia Berg

*For an overseer, as God's steward, must be **above reproach**. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must **hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught**, so that he may be able to **give instruction in sound doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1:7-9*

In the instructions given to the early church, elders or overseers of God's flock (and deacons) were to be selected to serve congregations (whereas Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Overseer). (Acts 14:23, Acts 20:17-31 - both of the words "elders" and "overseers" are used to refer to the same group of men; 1Pet. 2:25, 1Pet. 5:1-5) It was made perfectly clear that those who serve in that capacity must run their own households well, or they can't be trusted with the things of God. (A similar concept is taught in the Parable of the Minas in Luke 19 and of the Talents in Matt. 25, but with investment of the Lord's resources instead of managing a household; also see Luke 16:10-13.)

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. **Deacons** likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, **managing their children and their own households well**. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the*

**church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.** Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:1-16 (Also see Rev. 3:12, Rom. 8:18-19)

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2

Those are the standards set for the church, which is the Body of Christ, over which Jesus is the Head. (Eph. 1:22-23) Does anyone actually think that Jesus, ruler of His Father's household AND high priest in the order of Melchizedek (of which we are a royal priesthood - 2Pet. 2:9-10, Rev. 1:6, Rev. 5:10, Rev. 20:6), is going to permit disrespect and dishonor to run rampant in that household? (1Cor. 3:16-17) If so, think again. He didn't abduct us, and He doesn't hold us hostage—it's a PRIVILEGE to belong to His household, and there are "house rules." (Eph. 2:19-22, 1Tim. 3:15, Heb. 3:5-6, 1Pet. 4:17, Phil. 3:17-21, Gal. 6:10, 2Tim. 2:3-7, 1Cor. 9:24-27) If we choose to leave His house because we don't like His rules, He will allow it (but not until after His Spirit strives with the wayward soul, right up until they utterly renounce their faith in favor of sin, rebellion and love for this fallen world that is passing away - Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19-21, Rom. 8:26-27, Heb. 6:4-8, Heb. 10:26-31, Matt. 10:32-33, 2Tim. 2:12, 1John 2:15-17). It is one thing to be LOST and another thing to run away. (Luke 15:1-10) The father who welcomed back the prodigal son longed for Him and waited patiently for him to return—he didn't go chasing after him. (Luke 15:11-32, also see Luke 22:31-32.)

We have been warned not to let the deceitfulness of sin harden our hearts so that we fall away from God. (Heb. 3:12-14, 1 Cor. 10:1-13 - unbelief includes not only denying God exists, but also refusing to trust and obey Him.) If we belong to His household, but refuse to submit to discipline from Him when needed, there will be a cost. (Zeph. 2:3, Zeph. 3:11-13, 2Cor. 12:20-13:5, 1Pet. 5:6-11, 1Cor. 3:14-18, 1Cor. 11:32, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Heb. 13:4, 1Thess. 4:3-8, Gal. 5:21, Heb. 12:3-11, Rev. 3:19) If we ran the house the way we wanted to, that would be turning things around and making US God, wouldn't it. (Isa. 29:13-16)

Jesus endured suffering for the joy set before Him and we are to do the same, following in His steps. He told the disciples how to abide in Him (the Vine) and in His love, through obedience (and thus bear fruit for the Father's glory) so that His joy may be in them and their joy may be full. He said these things right before He told them the world would hate them as it hated Him. (John 15:11)

You are witnesses, and God also, how **holy and righteous and blameless** was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to **walk in a manner worthy of God**, who **calls you into his own kingdom and glory**. 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, **consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him**, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but **Christ is faithful over God's house as a son**. And **we are his house if indeed we hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, '**They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.**' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" **Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God**. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be **hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**. For we have **come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end**. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion." Hebrews 3:1-15

Take a look at this Old Testament scene where Joshua the High Priest and some others are "signs" (symbolic) of the Branch (Jesus) and the church, over which Jesus is the Head:

And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: **If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will grant you to walk among those who are standing here**. Hear now, O Joshua the **high priest**, you and your friends who sit before you, for **they are men who are a sign**: behold, I will bring **my servant the Branch**. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with **seven** eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. Zechariah 3:6-9 (Also see Rev. 2:17.)

"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the **seven golden lampstands**, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the **seven lampstands are the seven churches**. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who **walks among the seven golden lampstands**.'" Revelation 1:20-2:1

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "**You are my Son, today I have begotten you**"; as he says also in another place, "**You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek**." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. **Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered**. And being made perfect, he became the source of **eternal salvation to all who obey him**, being designated by God a **high priest after the order of Melchizedek**. Hebrews 5:5-10

No one earns salvation, and yet, we are told to run a good race and fight the good fight. How is coming to faith either of those things? It's accepting a free gift and being born again, which we can do ONE time spiritually— just as are born once physically. (Eph. 2:8-10, John 3:3-8, Heb. 6:4-12) Everyone who believes has the right to become children of God (John 1:12-13). However, IF we want the "firstborn son" blessing and inheritance, then we need to overcome by following Jesus' example of faithfulness. (1Cor. 9:24-27, 2Tim. 2:3-7, Phil. 3:8-21) We begin to "run the race" referred to below when we believe. The "race" ends either when we die or Jesus returns for those who are His. (2Tim. 4:6-7) Either way, we can't go back and change the decisions we made during our life once we see with our eyes what was to have been pursued by faith. (Heb. 11) And we WILL care, so NOW is the time to make any changes needed in our walk with God if we want assurance of receiving all we hoped for and anticipated. (Heb. 6:9-12, Heb. 10:36, 1Pet. 1:6-9)

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

Notice that the following OT passage is quoted above, tying it in with the return of Christ:

**Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.** Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with **vengeance,** with the **recompense** of God. He will come and save you. Isaiah 35:3-4

And the above passage is quoted in Revelation, which was written to the churches—these warnings are for us to pay attention to.

"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my **recompense** with me, to **repay** each one for what he has done." Revelation 22:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him **to whom we must give account.** Hebrews 4:12-13 (Also Rev. 11:18)

God IS love, but He also hates sin, including the sin of rebellion against Him as Creator and Lord of ALL. He will not let those who war against Him and His saints (believers) go unpunished. (Num. 14:18, Jer. 30:11, Jer. 49:12, Rev. 6:15-17, Rev. 17:13-14, Rev. 19:17-21, Jude 1:14-15) There is forgiveness available for ALL of our sins, but we have to humble ourselves and admit we're not God—we're sinners, and we need a Savior (and there is ONE, Jesus). (Acts 4:11-12, John 14:6, John 3:35-36, 1John 2:23, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 6:23) Whoever denies the existence of God or denies Jesus as His Son and our Lord, who died for our sins and rose again, WILL perish. (Heb. 11:6, Isa. 43:9-13, Isa. 45:21-25, Deu. 32:43, Nah. 1:2-9, Luke 19:27, Matt. 10:32-33, Luke 12:8-10, Rev. 11:18, Rev. 16:4-7, Rev. 18:24, Heb. 10:26-30, Heb. 12:25-29, 1Pet. 4:17-18, 2Pet. 3:10-14, Rom. 1:18-20)

***Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*** Psalm 2:1-12 (Also see 1John 4:18 for reassurance that those who truly believe in their hearts, and therefore love and obey Jesus, have nothing to fear.)

There is a beautiful foreshadow of Jesus having charge over His Father's house when Joseph (representing Jesus—both betrayed and forsaken by their brothers) was given rule over Egypt by Pharaoh, representing God the Father. (Gen. 41:40-46, but the whole account is given in Gen. 37-50; age 30 - Luke 3:23, 2Sam. 5:4-5)

Jesus is established as High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, "King of Righteousness," also King of Peace, since Melchizedek in Genesis was the King of Salem. Solomon's prosperous and peaceful kingdom was a foreshadow of Jesus' millennial kingdom. (1Kings 1:32-35, Heb. 5:5-10; Salem and Solomon both mean "peace.") It seems like more than a coincidence to me that the sons of Zadok (also meaning "righteousness") are the only priests allowed to come

near to minister to the Lord in the temple described in Ezekiel (which has yet to be built). (Ezek. 40:45-57, Ezek. 44:15-17, Ezek. 48:11-12)

We can learn more about Zadok and his sons in 2 Samuel 15. King David had to flee for his life up to the Mount of Olives due to his son Absalom trying to seize his crown. Many people in David's kingdom were deceived by Absalom, but the priest Zadok and his sons followed him and were loyal to him. These days, the "ruler" or "god" of this world has deceived a great many people (including too many of those who profess to belong to God's household) into going along with him as he rebels against his Creator (in a somewhat similar manner to Absalom rebelling against David). (2Cor. 4:3-4, John 14:30-31, 2Cor. 11:13-15) Who are we going to give our allegiance to?

We know that genuine believers in this mystery age of the Church are the temple of God. (Eph. 5:32, Col. 1:26-28, Eph. 2:11-22, 1Cor. 3:16, 1Cor. 6:19, 2Cor. 6:16, 1Pet. 2:4-5, John 14:15-24) Perhaps when John is told in the following passage to "measure the temple and those who worship there," these are the same people who are at that time dwelling in heaven and being cursed by the beast? (Forty-two months is the amount of time that the beast has power over the saints on earth—also referred to as an "hour" in Rev. 17:12.) Great promises have been made to all who overcome (Rev. 2-3, Rev. 21:7 - including the one to Philadelphia of being kept out of the hour of trial—whereas Smyrna was also faithful and severely persecuted, but required to be faithful unto death in order to receive their crown of life). (Rev. 2:8-10, Rev. 3:7-13, John 12:25-26) Another promise to Philadelphia is to never leave the temple.

*Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "**Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.**" Revelation 11:1-2*

*And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 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.** Therefore, **rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!** But **woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"** Revelation 12:10-12*

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for **forty-two months**. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, **blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven**. Revelation 13:5-6*

Jesus has provided those who are IN Him access to the Most Holy Place, which previously was reserved for the High Priest (which is now Himself). (Heb. 9) Those who have not been made spotless by His precious blood may not enter. (Heb. 10:19-31, Heb. 12:14, Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 19:7-8) Anyone who delights in "rolling in the mud" in their robe of righteousness, which was clean when they received it, but they just don't care that it cost Jesus His LIFE to provide it, is taking the chance that they will be denied entry. (Heb. 10:26-39, Heb. 12:14-17, Rev. 21:8, Rev. 22:11) It's one thing to slip and "soil" one's garment, but another to willfully sin and refuse to repent and ask forgiveness, not even caring about being cleansed. (1John 1:3-10, 1John 3:3-10)

We have enough sense to know there's a difference between a child who fell into the mud and one who jumped in. We also have enough sense to see that someone whose clothes are full of mud is not "clean," and we need to give God enough credit that He can see when someone's white garment is filthy, just like the wicked heart inside of them. (Matt. 15:19, Rev. 3:4, Jude 1:23, 2Pet. 2:22, 2Pet. 1:9, Isa. 29:15, Psa. 94, Psa. 91:14-16, Psa. 50:14-23, Heb. 12:14, Jam. 1:27) There are only two things worse than being found by Jesus in a soiled garment (which is proof that someone loved the world and their old sinful self more than Him). (Matt. 10:37) One is to refuse to put it on, and the other is even worse yet—to put it on, but then take it off. (John 2:28-29, Rev. 3:17-19, Matt. 22:11-13, 2Pet. 2:18-21)

Jesus has gone to prepare a place for those who belong to Him so that we can see His glory and be with Him forever. (John 17:24, 1John 3:2, 1Thess. 4:17) We know the way to be ready to go when He comes to take us where He is (John 17:24, Matt. 25:1-13), because not only is HE the door (John 10:9), but He also set an example for us of how to walk the narrow road. (1John 2:1-6, Matt. 7:13-14, Luke 13:23-30) We will glory with Him IF we suffer with Him.

*"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that **I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.**" Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one***

**comes to the Father except through me.** If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.** Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, **whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. **Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.****" Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "**If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.** These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." John 14:1-26

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For **whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**" Mark 8:34-38

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and **laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.** Luke 23:26

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore **let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are **pleasing to God.** Hebrews 13:12-16

**Count it all joy, my brothers,** when you meet **trials of various kinds,** for you know that **the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. **For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might **die to sin and live to righteousness.** By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:19-25 (See also Romans 6.)

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.** Romans 8:7-23*

The description in the passage below of how we believers are to think and behave explains how we worship with our lives NOW. (Rom. 12:1-2) We're the church ALL of the time, not just when we gather together once a week. (Col. 1:18) The point in emphasizing these things repeatedly isn't to be "holier than thou," as though some of us are perfect and need to berate everyone else. The point is that we need to encourage one another to please God, not men. (Gal. 1:10) The time left until Jesus returns is a little shorter every day—it's possible that some will not have the luxury of time (many years) that those of us who are older had to figure things out and get our priorities straight. What pleases God is to put ALL of our trust in HIM, and we show it when we love, respect and obey Him.

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.** Put to **death** therefore what is **earthly** in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On **account of these** the **wrath of God** is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But **now you must put them all away:** anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have **put off the old self with its practices** and have **put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.** Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,*

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and **admonishing one another in all wisdom**, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **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 3:1-25

Thus says the LORD: "**Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be,** declares the LORD. But **this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.** "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have **chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations;** I also will **choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen;** but they **did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.**" Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "**Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame.**" The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! **The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!** Isaiah 66:1-6

Hopefully we all understand that the house of God is not a man-made building, but rather believers who are called out of the world and into the Body of Christ to be His dwelling place. (Rom. 12:5, 1Cor. 12:27, Col. 1:24, Eph. 3:6, Eph. 5:23, 29-30, John 14:17, Rom. 8:9, 2Tim. 1:14) The household of God includes

the adopted sons and daughters whom Jesus has redeemed with His precious blood. (Rev. 5:9-10, 2Cor. 6:17-18, Rom. 8:14-19, 29) Instead of thinking that everyone who "goes to church" with us is a true child of God, whether or not their behavior ("fruit") shows that His Spirit dwells in them, we need to WISE up. (1Cor. 15:33-34, Eph. 5:3-21) We were warned in advance that deception would run rampant! We need to stay awake and on our guard against it.

IF we're His sheep, then we need to recognize the difference between His voice and the voice (and "fruits") of false teachers, who are "thieves" - "hirelings" - "shepherds feeding themselves on the flock"—and RUN away from them. They are trying to lead us on the broad path to destruction! (Jer. 23:21-22) We need to FOLLOW the Good Shepherd, not just hear His voice and then ignore it anyway! We need to care more about what God wants from us than what misguided people around us think we should do, and/or what they'll think of us if we don't go along with them. (1Pet. 4:1-5, 2Tim. 3:12-13, Eph. 4:17-32)

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the **door** of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."* John 10:1-18 (Also read all of Ezek. 34.)

Let's end with the following passage, which has SO MUCH applicable wisdom, that I'm at a loss as to what to highlight. People love to quote little snippets instead of reading whole passages so they can see which ones are related according to the context. I suggest that we each get out our own marking pens and pay close attention to what Jesus has said here for our benefit. After that, keep going by studying the Bible every day! It's anything but boring.

*"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:13-29*

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