

Never Turn Back (from Following Jesus)

by Tricia Berg

For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them. 2 Peter 2:21

The sign on the banner being flown in the layout accompanying this article says "return to God," which is to get back on the straight and narrow path of following Jesus rather than wandering away from the truth. Jesus warned that many would call Him "Lord, Lord," but not OBEY Him AS Lord. He said that few travel the hard, narrow way to eternal life, but most prefer the broad, easy path to destruction. As unbelievably sad as it is, those who follow the popular path will not enter the kingdom of God.

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk in him**, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7*

*"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 (Also see Luke 6:43-49.)

These are the words of JESUS. We know that He most certainly is NOT advocating "works salvation," but simply telling it like it is. If we who believe IN Him also believe what He SAID, then it will hopefully inspire us to not only be careful of our own walk, but also to have the courage to speak the truth to others, out of LOVE for their souls. (Eph. 4:15-24) The point is NOT that we must (or even could) earn salvation. It's that those who truly believe will show it because they are truly a new creation, not just "new" in lofty words with no substance. (2Cor. 5:17) The "moment" of coming to faith is not the entire journey, it's the beginning of following Christ. (Matt. 16:16-17, John 13:36, 14:4, 21:15-19)

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. John 15:6

*For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and **produces a crop** useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a **blessing** from God. But **if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned**. Hebrews 6:7-8*

*Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and **in time of testing fall away**. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are **choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature**. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. Luke 8:11-15 (Also see Matt. 3:7-12, Acts 26:19-20, Heb. 12:11, 6:11-12, Jam. 5:7-11, Gal. 6:9)*

Most believers these days "don't have time" to read their Bibles for themselves, so they are easy targets for people who are more than happy to tell them what it says, according to their own interpretation. With that in mind, here is the full context (chapter) of the verse at the top of this article:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves

swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, **making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly**; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then **the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! **Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.** They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: **"The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."** 2 Peter 2:1-22 (There are more details about Balaam's errors in my article "[Vine of Sodom.](#)")**

We need to read the context, and also related passages, rather than little snippets if we want to build up our understanding and our faith that is based on the whole truth. Not only are verses frequently taken out of context from full passages, but even pieces of verses are used to support the preferred agendas of false teachers who are deceiving the masses in order to become rich and popular by telling them what they like to hear. (Rom. 15:14, 1Cor. 3:1-3, Heb. 5:11-14, Col. 1:9-10, Phil. 1:9-11, Eph. 4:12-16, 2Tim. 3:12-17, 1Tim. 4:16, 1Cor. 15:34, 2Pet. 1:8, 2Pet. 3:17-18)

*Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I **did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God**. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure **fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them**. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I **coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel**. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**'" Acts 20:26-35*

*As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus **storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life**. O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. **Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith**. Grace be with you. 1 Timothy 6:17-21*

We were given the right to become children of God when we believed that Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose from the dead, and that He is now Lord and Savior of those He redeemed with His precious blood, including ourselves. (John 1:12-13, Rom. 10:8-9, Eph. 1:7) We who are born again have the firstfruits of the Spirit, having entered into the New Covenant by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus of Himself. (Heb. 9:24-28, John 10:14-18, 1Pet. 1:18-19, 1Cor. 5:7, John 3:3-8, Rom. 8:23, 2Thess. 2:13, Jam. 1:18, Luke 22:20, 1Cor. 11:23-26, John 14:15-26, Rom. 8:9)

We have inherited eternal life, so long as we hold fast to our faith. (John 3:16, 3:36, 5:24, 6:40, 47, 10:28, 17:1-3, Rom. 6:23, 1John 1:23-27, 5:11-13, Heb. 3:5-6, 14, 10:23, 12:18-29, 1Cor. 15:1-8, Rev. 3:11, Jam. 1:12, Matt. 10:32-33, Luke 9:62, 12:8-9, 2Tim. 2:12) Jesus doesn't "lose" us or "cast out" those who truly believe, but He doesn't force us to believe OR to obey Him as Lord (which is to ABIDE in Him). (John 6:39-40, 48, 63-71, 10:28-30, and don't discount John 10:27, Luke 9:23, John 15:1-17) We need not fear anything if we love Him (but remember, that also means obeying Him - John 14:15). (1John 4:18, 5:18, Rom. 16:20)

If someone claims to believe but would rather trade away part of their future, glorious inheritance than to deny themselves and follow Christ (which may very well include suffering for His sake - 1Pet. 1:6-9), we can be sure they will regret it. (Matt. 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 9:23-26) As we'll see later, not all sons are firstborn, and any believer who fails to appreciate that until they see with their own eyes is utterly foolish.

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, **the love of the Father is not in him.** For all that is in the world—the desires of the **flesh** and the desires of the **eyes** and **pride of life**—is **not from the Father but is from the world.** And the world is **passing away** along with its **desires**, but whoever **does the will of God abides forever.** 1 John 2:15-17*

*And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but **those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection out from the dead** neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are **sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.**" Luke 20:34-36 (Also see Rom. 8:16-19, Phil. 3:10-12.)*

Like Abraham, our sincere faith is counted as righteousness. *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses unto salvation. Romans 10:10* Like Abraham, we are expected to serve God because we DO believe and have received the wonderful, eternal promises of salvation and residence in the kingdom of God. (Heb. 4:16-17, Gal. 3:7-9, Rev. 21:3) Would Abraham have been called a friend of God if he said he believed, but didn't do as God instructed him? How about Moses? (Deut. 34:10-12) Putting God to the test through disobedience is at best ignorance, and at worst, a sign of unbelief. It's an utterly foolish, inadvisable thing to do if we know the great power of our awesome God, but many believe in a "god" who bends to their wishes instead of the other way around. (Jam. 2:22-23, John 15:14 - and His commands are not burdensome for those who LOVE Him - 1John 5:3, also Psa. 95:6-11, Heb. 3, 12:18-29, Rom. 9:20-21, Isa. 29:16, 10:15, 45:9-10)

If we actually believe we're a part of a royal priesthood (in the Order of Melchizedek, over which Jesus is High Priest and King of Righteousness - Heb. 5:8-10, 7:1-3), then what do we think we'll be doing for eternity except worshipping and serving God in holiness? (Rev. 22:3-5) Is it okay to deliberately defile God's temple (our bodies) NOW, but not later? (Rev. 21:27) Why would anyone think that, especially anyone who LOVES God? (1Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10, 1:14-16, 2Pet. 3:11, 14, 1Thess. 4:7, 2Cor. 7:1, Heb. 12:14, Rev. 3:12, 5:9-10, 2Cor. 5:14-15, John 14:15) We're washed from our sins by Jesus' precious blood when we admit we've sinned and repent. (1John 1:7-9, Rev. 7:14, John 6:63, Acts 11:16) To be holy is to be pure and set apart, not mixed in with the filth of the world we've been called OUT of. (1Pet. 1:14-19, John 15:19, Rev. 3:4, Jam. 1:27)

*But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a **better possession and an abiding one.** Therefore **do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.** For you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have **done the will of God you may receive what is promised.** For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."* But we are **not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who **have faith and preserve their souls.**** Hebrews 10:32-39

*Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were **once** foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have **believed** in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3:1-8*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! **According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the***

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that being destroyed by fire is being refined—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3-9

"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." Psalm 91:14-16 (Also see John 14:15, 15:10.)

All true believers in this age are being grafted into the "cultivated olive tree" of Israel. (Rom. 11:17-24, Titus 1:16, 1John 3:6, 9, Phil. 3:18-19) As such, we are fellow heirs to the kingdom of God and members of His household. (Eph. 2:19-22, 3:6, Matt. 10:25, 24:45-51, Luke 12:41-48, Gal. 6:10, 1Tim. 3:14-15, 1Pet. 4:17) Please note that adopted children do not replace children born before them, nor does a tree become the same kind as a branch that has been grafted into it—believing Gentiles are now "cultivated" instead of "wild." There is a "fullness of the Gentiles" to come in, after which those Jews who have been "blinded of sight/hardened of heart" will "see" and receive "hearts of flesh" to replace their "hearts of stone"—thus, entering the New Covenant as we have. Their "broken off branches" will be grafted back in if they believe, and our branches CAN be broken off if we don't abide in His love. (Rom. 11:19-25, John 15:9-10, Jude 1:20-21, 1John 5:3, Matt. 13:10-17, Luke 8:9-10, Rev. 1:7, John 19:37, Matt. 24:30, Zech. 12:10-14, Matt. 23:39, Hos. 5:15, Ezek. 36:26-28)

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:24-29

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 8:13-23

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. 14 For we have come to **share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.** Hebrews 3:5-6, 14

Obviously, we have not yet received our inheritance—faith is the assurance of things unseen. (Heb. 11:1) While we're waiting, we must not trade it in for any temporary, earthly thing. Esau was the firstborn son of Isaac, and such, was to have received the inheritance and blessing specially reserved for the firstborn. But he traded his inheritance to his twin, Jacob (who was born probably only minutes after him), for a bowl of soup. Later, his blessing was also given to Jacob. (Gen. 25:29-34, Gen. 27) (Also see my article "[Cain's Offering](#)" for more about how we show that we value our firstborn inheritance as those who have come to the Church of the Firstborn (Jesus) - Heb. 12:22-24, Rom. 8:23, Jam. 1:18.)

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 12:14-17

Our "bowl of soup" might be wanting to be famous and rich (or at least exceedingly "comfortable"), investing all of the blessings God gives us on

ourselves, our family and friends instead of in the kingdom of God. (Matt. 6:19-21, 24, 33-34, 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, Luke 12:13-21, 31-34, 14:12-14, 16:9-15, 1Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19, Gal. 6:10, Jam. 2:1-13, 5:1-6, Rev. 3:17-19) Or it could be indulging ourselves in sexual immorality instead of exercising self-control through the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God. (Titus 2:11-15, Gal. 5:16-25, Rom. 13:11-14, 12:1-2, Matt. 5:32, 15:18-20, 19:9, Mark 7:18-23, Acts 15:19-20, 15:28-29, 21:25, Rom. 13:13, 1Cor. 5, 6:9-20, 10:8, 2Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:3-12, Col. 3:5-7, 1Thess. 4:2-8, 1Tim. 1:8-11, Heb. 12:15-17, 13:4, 2Pet. 2:6-10, Jude 1:6-8, Rev. 2:14, 2:21, 9:20-21, 21:8, 22:15)

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 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 3:9-18*

I would encourage everyone to read the story of the "prodigal son" in Luke 15:11-32 carefully in order to remove the fluffy parts that people have added to their songs and writings that were NOT in the Bible. He did not "get lost," but he left home in order to "live it up." Due to his own foolishness, he spent his inheritance in advance. His father did not run after him to convince him to come home, but waited patiently. He then welcomed his wayward son with open arms after he had come to his senses and returned on his own. (While the voice of his conscience could probably be compared symbolically with the prompting of the Holy Spirit for believers to repent of their sins, there is a difference between our conscience, which everyone has, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom only

believers have - Rom. 2:15-16, John 7:37-39). The fact that he took a job caring for pigs emphasizes how he was not keeping separate from the world (as pigs were unclean animals for Jews, as a symbol of their separation from the world - Lev. 11:7-8, Deut. 14:8, Acts 10-11). Believers in this age are also meant to be separate in their behavior despite there being no food restrictions. (2Cor. 6:14-7:1, 1Pet. 2:11, 1Cor. 15:33-34, Mark 7:21-23, John 15:18-21, Eph. 4-5, 1Thess. 4:1-8, Col. 3, 1Pet. 4:3-7). Also see my articles "[Warned by Every Prophet](#)" and "[Be Fruitful](#)."

*Now these things took place as **examples for us**, that we might **not desire evil as they did**. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." **We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did**, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **We must not put Christ to the test**, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **nor grumble**, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an **example**, but they were **written down for our instruction**, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. **No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.** Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 1 Corinthians 10:6-14 (Also see Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5.)*

This young man never stopped "believing" who his father was, but he didn't HONOR him as such. Sadly, it wasn't even love for his father that brought him home, but the realization that he had been better off there (just like God's ways are best and for our good.) When he came back (ashamed of himself - Rom. 6:20-23), he was still a son—but the fact remains that his inheritance had been squandered on wicked, temporary things. Without a doubt, believers who truly are born of God but make poor choices during this lifetime will be as relieved to be in heaven as the prodigal son was to be home. But remember, the prodigal CEASED his sinful lifestyle and RETURNED to his father's household. He didn't die while pursuing evil. And unlike him, we have the Spirit IN us to bear GOOD "fruit," such as self-control. (Gal. 5:16-25, Phil. 2:12-16, Titus 2:11-15) If we have no such fruit or even desire for it, then we need to examine ourselves. (2Cor. 13:5)

If we could ask the prodigal son or Esau if it was worth it to indulge themselves at the time, but to pay a high price for it later, I'm sure that they would answer, "NO!" Our behavior during this short earthly lifetime affects forever. (But remember, until it's our time to go or Jesus returns, we can repent and receive forgiveness, making the best use of the time that's left. He is faithful to forgive!

1John 1:9, Eph. 5:15-17, Matt. 25:10-13) No doubt there are some in heaven now who wish they could get a message to their loved ones not to take their advice about wealth management, shrewd business practices, and such things, but rather, to invest in the kingdom of God. But some who have no compassion on the poor and needy will find that God cannot be fooled by feigned faith.

*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 6:3-10*

*We love because he first loved us. **If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.** And this commandment we have from him: **whoever loves God must also love his brother.** 1 John 4:19-21*

Jesus told of a rich man in Hades who wanted Abraham to send a poor man whom he knew during his lifetime, Lazarus (who had also died, but had gone to Paradise), back to warn his family not to live as he had done. The rich man was born into one of the tribes of Israel, since he called Abraham "Father" (and Abraham is the patriarch of Israel, being the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes whose name was changed to Israel - Gen. 32:28, Ex. 1:1-4, 3:6). (Matt. 19:16-30, Matt. 25:31-46) He certainly thought of himself as a member of God's chosen people and would have known the command "love your neighbor" (also see Deut. 15:11), but he didn't obey it by having compassion on Lazarus, who was a fellow Jew and poor neighbor.

The rich man's sins were atoned for temporarily (and thus repeatedly) with the blood of animals, but we are washed from our sins by the precious blood of Jesus, shed ONE time for all. (Heb. 7:27, 9:24-28, Rom. 6:10) We are expected to appreciate the suffering of Jesus on our behalf (Isa. 52:13-53:12, Rom. 1:21, 1Cor 15:56-57, 2Cor. 9:15, Eph. 5:4, 20, Col. 1:12-14, 2:6-7, 3:15-17, 4:2, 1Thess. 5:16-22), and also to recognize that everything we have, including our abilities of every kind and our very lives, are gifts from God, who made and owns everything that exists or ever has existed. (Matt. 6:25-34, 7:7-11, Luke 11:9-13,

12:22-31, Jam. 1:17, 2Cor. 9:11, Phil. 4:6, 1Tim. 1:4-5) (Whatever we have made, we did so using HIS materials, with the intellect He bestowed, most likely copying His original designs...)

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." Leviticus 19:17-18 (Also see Matt. 5:21-24, 1John 2:9-11, 3:15-18, 4:20-21.)

*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and **your neighbor as yourself.**" And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."* Luke 10:25-28

*As **obedient children**, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, **you also be holy in all your conduct**, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as **Father** who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the **futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.** 1 Peter 1:14-19*

Notice that when Jesus gave an example of loving our neighbor in Luke 10:29-37, He did NOT say "approve of their sin." That's because He doesn't contradict Himself—that's NOT what He taught, ever. (John 5:14, 8:11) He said not to be a hypocrite and pick at others, pretending we're not sinners ourselves. We're to deal with sin inside the Church (Matt. 18:15-17, Luke 17:3-4, 1Cor. 5, 1Tim. 5:20-21), but not without addressing our own issues FIRST. (Matt. 7:1-5, Rom. 2:1-11) This does NOT mean that since no one is perfect (except God), sin can never be dealt with. It means that we're to hold ourselves and each other accountable, as fellow members of the household of God. (Gal. 6:1, Jam. 5:19-20) This is for the health of the Body of Christ. (1Cor. 5:6-8, 12:27) It's the right thing to do if we love Jesus and each other.

*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.*** 1 Timothy 3:14-15

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

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to **insist on these things**, so that those who **have believed in God** may be **careful to devote themselves to good works**. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3:8

The degree of glory that awaits each of us is undeniably connected with the faithfulness of our service (and when we serve others, we're serving Him - Matt. 25:40, 25:20-28, John 13:14-17, Col. 3:23-24, 1Pet. 4:8-11, 1John 3:16-18, Jam. 2:15-16, Gal. 6:10, Heb. 6:10) and measure of our suffering on this earth for Jesus' sake (for His glory, not in any attempt to save ourselves or anyone else). (Luke 6:22-23, Acts 5:41, 2Thess. 1:3-12, Phil. 1:27-30, 2Tim. 3:12, 4:5, Luke 20:34-36, Rev. 2-3, Heb. 10:32-39, Heb. 12, 1Pet. 1:6-7, 2:18-25, 3:13-17, 4:12-19, Zech. 13:7-9, Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27, John 15:8) We're not to covet anything for ourselves, but only glory and honor for our Lord and Savior. His giving us rewards WILL bring Him glory and honor, forever. We are part of the "joy set before Him." (Heb. 12:2, Rev. 11:18, 22:12-15)

"Blessed are you when others **revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account**. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:11-12

"Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear." 13 "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 13:8-9, 23

Then Peter said in reply, **"See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"** Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And **everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and**

will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Matthew 19:27-30

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. **Let each one take care how he builds upon it.** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 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 3:10-15

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

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. **And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.** But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." Daniel 12:2-4

"Endurance" is not required to "hold fast" to a faith that requires NOTHING of us. It's needed to resist temptation to return to our former manner of life when we indulged our flesh before coming to the knowledge of the truth. It's needed to persevere through trials which are passed by not turning back even though life is hard for everyone at some point or another—and for Christians, life is expected to be hard sometimes for the very reason that they are followers of Christ. (2Tim. 3:12-17) God doesn't want us to desire to "go back to Egypt" (the world) where we were slaves (to sin). (Ex. 14:11-12, Num. 11:4-6, 14:1-4, 21:5, Rom. 6:15-19, 2Pet. 2:18-22. Titus 3:3) He desires our WHOLE hearts to trust and follow Him, even if—no, especially if—we're facing "giants." (Num. 13:30-33,

14:6-11, 1Sam. 17:47, Isa. 31:1, Psa. 147:10-11, 33:18-22) Turning back is NOT an option! (Heb. 10:39, Gen. 19:26)

*Blessed is the man who remains **steadfast under trial**, for when he has **stood the test** he will receive the **crown of life**, which God has promised **to those who love him**. James 1:12*

*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were **strangers and exiles on the earth**. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, **they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one**. Therefore **God is not ashamed to be called their God**, for he has **prepared for them a city**. Hebrews 11:13-16 (Also see John 14:1-3, 1Cor. 2:9, Rev 21:2.)*

*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the **souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. **Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years**. Revelation 20:4-6 (Also see Phil. 3:8-16, 2Tim. 2:3-7, 4:7-8, Rev. 2:8-11, 3:7-13, 6:9-11.)*

Even though Jesus IS God (John 1:1-5, 8:58, 10:30, 17:11, 21-26, Col. 1:15-20, 2:9-10, Matt. 2:11, 14:33, 28:9, 17, Luke 24:52, John 9:38, Isa. 45:21-23, 46:8-13, 42:8), the Word who became flesh, His Father was particularly pleased to call Him Son after He had completed His mission—confirming that His perfect, sacrificial offering on our behalf was accepted by His rising from the dead. (John 8:29, Acts 13:26-33, 17:30-31, Psalm 2, 89:26-27, Heb. 1, 2:10, 5:5-10 - There is also a “picture” of this in Zech. 3—also see Isa. 42-45, Luke 3:21-22.)

*Jesus said to them, "My food is to **do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work**. John 4:34*

*For I have come down from heaven, **not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me**. John 6:38*

*And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for **I always do the things that are pleasing to him.***" John 8:29

As children of God, we're to please God and do His will as well, with His only begotten Son, Jesus, as our example. (1Pet. 2:21, Matt. 3:16-17, 17:5)

*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 3:21-24*

*So whether we are at home or away, **we make it our aim to please him.** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10*

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

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

*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** Hebrews 2:17-18 (Also see 1Cor. 10:13, Heb. 7:25, 1John 2:1.)*

*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. Hebrews 12:1-13 (Also Heb. 13:13)

Abiding in Jesus is the ONLY way to bear fruit and the ONLY way to overcome. (Jam. 4:7-8, 1Pet. 5:6-11, John 15:1-17, Rev. 2-3) When John says in 1John 5:4-5 that everyone born of God overcomes by their faith, he's talking about genuine, living faith, not empty words. He is the same person who wrote (by the power of the Holy Spirit) just a couple of "chapters" earlier (but it was all one letter and the breaks were added in by editors for the convenience of the reader) that whoever says they KNOW God and are BORN of Him, but refuses to turn from their sin is a LIAR. (1John 1:5-2:6, 26-29, 3:1-10, 24; also see Jam. 1:22-25, 2:14, 26, Matt. 7:21-29, Luke 6:43-49, Gal. 5:16, 24.)

Our fight is against invisible forces, which also drive many seen forces (and that is important for us to remember, rather than accepting that everything called "good" by this lost world is so, even when God has said otherwise - Isa. 5:20-21, Matt. 18:5-10, 6:22-23, 1Cor. 2:14, Gen. 1:27, 31, 2:24). (Eph. 6:10-20, 1Pet. 5:8, 2Tim. 2:26, Eph. 4:27, Luke 22:31, Eph. 3:9-10, Col. 2:15) Satan doesn't always come at us with a club (Luke 22:52-53), sometimes he comes against us with what seem to us to be "good" things, like prosperity or "love" that has been forbidden by God (i.e. any physical intimacy outside of marriage between a man and woman, by God's design). (John 12:4-6, Luke 22:3-6, 19:2, 8, 12:16-21, 7:39-47-48, John 8:3, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2) Let's be faithful to God through thick and thin, just as He is to us, and accept His higher, perfect ways and wisdom rather than insisting on our flawed ones. (Psa. 36:5-7, 100:5, Josh. 1:9, Heb. 13:4-6, Rev. 3:10, 12:11, Isa. 55:8-9, 1Cor. 3:18-20, 1:18-31)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth,** there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a **fearful expectation of judgment,** and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **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 10:23-31

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,** so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, being **rooted and grounded in love,** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God.** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, **according to the power at work within us,** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

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 3:17-21

If we love the world and its "treasures," then we will be more likely to turn back from following Jesus, especially if the road gets hard, and Jesus warned us that it would. (Matt. 7:13-29, Matt. 6:19-34, Matt. 5:10-16, 2Tim.3:12) He doesn't "lose" anyone or let them be taken from Him, but He didn't force us to believe and He doesn't force us to follow, either. We follow and obey because we LOVE Him, not out of fear or to get something. (1John 4:18, John 15:12-21) Let's not claim the glorious promises for ourselves that God made to those who love Him

if we're actually deceiving ourselves, because what we really love is the world (as in materialism, sinful pleasures, gratifying our fleshly desires, approval of men instead of God, etc.) (1John 2:15-16, James 4:4)

I am not saying that if we don't fulfill Jesus' commands to love God first and each other as ourselves perfectly (Mark 12:28-34), that we have lost the promise of eternal life even though we do believe. However, if the Spirit (who is our guaranty of salvation - 2Cor. 1:21-22, 5:5) is present within us, there will at least be a desire to please God. (Gal. 5:16-25, Matt. 7:15-27, Matt. 15:19) What I'm saying is that salvation is FREE, but the rewards in the next life, beyond salvation, are earned by the FAITHFUL. (Rev. 22:12, Heb. 6:9-12, 2Cor. 5:9-10, 1Cor. 3:11-17, Matt. 19:27-30, Rev. 17:14, Dan. 12:2-3, Rev. 2-3, Rom. 2:6-11, Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27, Col. 3:23-25)

Esau still received a very good blessing and became the father of a great nation, with many possessions. (Gen. 25:23) Nevertheless, he forfeited an even greater blessing and cried bitterly over it once he saw that it was too late. (Gen. 27:34-38) He didn't really give it that much thought after he willingly sold his inheritance to Jacob, until he saw it come to pass—then it came as a shock. I guess you could say that he took it for granted that he would receive what he expected no matter what he did or didn't do... We are not meant to gloat over what happened to him or any other example in the Bible, but to LEARN from it. (Oba. 1:12, Prov. 24:17-18, Rom. 11:17-21)

NOW is the time to get serious and put your devotion to God into ACTION if you TRULY love Him and are not just giving Him lip service. (John 4:23, Matt. 15:7-20, 1John 3:11-24) Jesus gave His warnings and advice to those "with an ear to hear." That means that IF we're wise, we'll listen (which is to HEED Him). (Matt. 25:1-13, Rev. 2-3, Matt. 7:24-27, also Jam. 1:22-25, Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23) Don't follow "deaf and blind people" on the broad road to destruction. (Matt. 7:13-14, 15:13-14, Luke 6:39-40)

There WILL be regrets by MANY who accepted the lukewarm ways of the world around them instead of running the good race. (Rev. 3:14-22, Philip. 3:8-21, 1Cor. 9:24-10:14, Heb. 12:1-2, Jer. 5:20-31) Some will enter "as through the fire," having failed to run a good race despite all of the exhortations in the Bible to do so. Salvation is free, having been FULLY paid for by Jesus and applied to each person by grace, upon only belief from the heart and willingly confessed with our mouths. (Rom. 10:9-10) However, if Jesus is our Savior, then He is also our LORD. God has prepared wonderful things for THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (Jam. 1:12, 1Cor. 2:9-10, John 14:1-3, Heb. 11:13-16, Rev. 21:2) We were warned not to try to fool Him. (Gal. 6:7-10, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Mal. 3:13-4:3, Psalm 50:16-23, Amos 5:18-20, Zeph. 1:12, Rev. 3:22-29)

I believe that some of the tears that God is going to wipe away will be shed because of relief that their great suffering on His behalf is finally over, and others will be shed by those who realize how little love they showed their Savior who is more worthy than ANYTHING or ANYONE could ever be, who still loves us even though we are so utterly undeserving. (Rev. 7:17, Rev. 21:4) We do shed many tears caused by the fallen nature of ourselves and this world, but we don't earn rewards for going through difficulties that we made for ourselves —because we failed to resist temptation, accepted the poor advice and values of the world, and things like that. We earn rewards for graciously persevering through troubles that are no fault of our own and for enduring persecution for His sake. (1Pet. 2:18-25, 3:13-17) It's not easy to stand up for the truth in a world that considers it to be hate and thinks that love means telling people what they want to hear—especially giving approval of their sins. It's not easy to love our enemies, some of whom we have been warned will be our own family by blood, so-called friends, or even others who profess to believe. (Matt. 10:34-42, Micah 7:5-7, Rev. 2:8-11, Rev. 3:7-13, Isaiah 66:5, Proverbs 8:13, Eph. 4:15-32)

When the Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the temple, there was a celebration at the time the foundation was laid. There was a LOT of noise, including some who were shouting with joy and others who were crying because of how much less grand the new temple was than Solomon's. It was so loud that the two sounds couldn't be distinguished from one another. (Ezra 3:10-13, also see Zech. 4-6 and Hag. 2, which contain “pictures” of the glorious days to come when the “capstone” is put on the temple built without human hands of Jesus’ Body, finishing it, and He will be both High Priest and King. 1Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10, Eph. 2:17-22, 5:23, Col. 1:24, John 2:21, 1Cor. 6:19-20, 1Cor. 3:16-17, Rev. 19:11-16) Perhaps that's similar in a way to how the tears will be mixed in the future. Some will cry at relief they have done what they set out to do—to glorify God (similar to someone who has finished a marathon against all odds and with all of their energy spent—but we are never alone in this race), and some will weep with intense regret (like Esau did) upon seeing with their own eyes what they gave up for the worthless temporary treasures of the world and how worthy Jesus is of their PURE devotion, but the “race” is over. (Matt. 6:19-34, 2Cor. 11:2-3, 1Cor. 9:24-27, 2Tim. 2:3-7)

*You adulterous people! Do you not know that **friendship with the world is enmity with God**? Therefore whoever wishes to be a **friend of the world** makes himself an **enemy of God**. James 4:4*

God's character and values have not changed. He still hates sin and always will. He is faithful and demands faithfulness from His servants. (John 12:24-28, Phil. 2:14-18, 2Tim. 1:13, Col. 2:18-19, 1Cor. 9:24-27) If He changes, then we have no assurance of anything, do we? He is going to do marvelous things in the

future. (Hag. 2, Isa. 43:18-21, Rev. 21:5) When Jesus returns to reign during the millennium, He will cleanse HIS land (Psalm 24:1-2, Job 41:11, Psa. 50:12) of everything that causes sin. (Matt. 13:36-52, Zech. 13:1-2, Zeph. 3:11-12) Until then, we need to walk as He walked so that we can hear the words "well done, good and faithful servant" when we stand before Him. (1John 2:3-6, 1Pet. 2:21-23, Matt. 25:21, Luke 19:17, 1Pet. 4:12-19, Col. 3:23-25, Gal. 6:4-5, Rom. 2:6-11, 14:12) Since we'll each answer for ourselves, let's not allow anyone else to discourage us from loving God and our neighbor in truth with all our hearts. (John 4:23-24, 1Pet. 1:22-23)

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "**No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.**" Luke 9:57-62 (Also see 2Cor. 4:11, Heb. 12:9, Rom. 6:10-11.)*

*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*

*"**Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.** By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: '**To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.**' "Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory." Isaiah 45:22-25 (Also see Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:9-11.)*

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