

Question for You

by Tricia Berg

Question: Has God become less worthy of your love now that almost 2000 years have passed since He gave His only Son to save you? Or has He become less powerful than He was, so that there is no longer any need to have a healthy respect for Him that you should obey? Is society more "enlightened" now, such that people know "better"? No? Then why are so many professed believers behaving as though He doesn't know what they do, say and think?

Jesus summarized what is expected of believers in two simple commands: Love your one true God as your highest priority, above all people and things, and love your neighbor as yourself. Those cover ALL of the commands if you do them. When God is first, then you care about His honor and glory most--you don't follow the world, but Him--you know that what you do reflects on Him. When you love your brothers and sisters in the Lord and your neighbors (everyone else, and even your enemies), you care enough to warn them about the consequences of sin--eternal punishment for anyone who is not redeemed by the blood of Jesus through grace by faith. You don't sugar-coat sin for them, celebrate it, join them or do anything to cause them to stumble in it; and you don't pretend like they're the only ones with the problem, because EVERYONE has the sinful nature and will struggle against it until we die (but that doesn't mean giving in to it--fight the good fight!)

To be an overcomer and inherit all of the glorious promises of God, you need to lay down your will and take up His--even unto death IF need be. (That includes literal death, not just "death by social media.") Am I adding works to salvation? No. I'm saying what the Bible says: that eternal life depends upon believing and that saving faith is evidenced by works; and some will enter into eternal life as through the fire, with loss of reward. Think about it. Do you want to give up ETERNAL rewards for a very short time of having your own way here on earth? If you do, you'll regret it. I just hope that the regret is NOT that you never were saved to begin with. The Bible tells you to examine yourself to be sure you are in the faith.

If you LOVE Jesus, you will not think to yourself that "it was worth it" to "live it up" during this brief lifetime at the expense of your witness to His beautiful, holy, perfect and loving nature. That is loving yourself more than God when you enjoy your sin so much that you will not give it up for Him, and that my friend, is idolatry. You were meant to CARE about the lost souls for whom you are the LIGHT, because He should be shining through you. He will return to gather

those who are His prior to executing the wrath of God against the rest. Time's up when that happens or when your own personal "appointment" arrives. Does anyone know when either will be? No, they don't. (Don't watch absurd YouTube videos by "prophets" setting dates, taking donations, giving messages that don't match the Bible, etc.)

If Jesus returns SOON, are you ready? If you picture Him with you throughout every day and night, is there anything you would be embarrassed for Him to see? How about watching or listening to media that exalts all sorts of immorality, laughing at inappropriate jokes, gossiping, lying, being greedy or gluttonous, envying, lacking purity in "private" matters, and anything else shameful? ALL can be forgiven, but Scripture says He is faithful to forgive and cleanse you when you confess it to Him. You are not meant to live as though you forgot what it cost Him to clothe you in pristine white. You WILL slip (and He is willing to cleanse you again and again when you repent and ask Him), but you will not live IN continual, deliberate sin. One of the fruits of His Spirit is self-control--if you haven't got it (and hopefully it is increasing if you do), then make sure you really are saved because whoever hasn't got His Spirit is NOT His. (He's returning for those who are IN Him, who were given to Him by His Father.)

Getting back to your day-to-day life, would He ask why you manage to make time for so many meaningless things that have NO eternal value and yet claim not to have time to pray, worship and read your Bible? Would God ask why you don't speak up against it when people tell lies about Him, saying that everyone goes to heaven whether they believe in His Son or not? What about when they say that He has "changed" such that He no longer hates sin--no worries, just SAY you believe and you're good to go? That is what He means when He says you are the SALT of the earth--speaking the truth in love (not love of sin, but of lost souls). He said that salt that has lost its saltiness is useless. He said if you don't FOLLOW Him, you're not worthy of Him.

Know this. Jesus DOES see every.single.thing you do and say (and even knows what your thoughts and attitudes are). Your behavior shows how much you love and respect Him (or don't). He IS with you at ALL times if you are born again, because that means you are indwelt by His Holy Spirit. (Remember, God is ONE. We know Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but there is really no "dissecting" Him and putting Him into various "boxes.") If you don't have His Spirit, then you are NOT born again, you do NOT belong to Him and you will NOT enter the kingdom of God. It's by HIS power that you can overcome. When you truly believed in your heart that Jesus was the Son of God who died for your sins and rose again--that He is now your Lord--you were baptized into

Him, into His death and resurrection, by the regenerating power of His Holy Spirit, who then STAYS with you to teach, guide and strengthen you in the faith.

Please note: Water baptism is symbolic of the fact that as a believer, your old sinful self has been drowned and you now live in Christ and His resurrection, a new creation, washed clean, rising up out of the water. As with the Lord's Supper, it comes AFTER belief--your physical actions could never bring about faith--the Spirit alone saves. If you think about it, that would be works if you could do something to bring it about. Faith comes from hearing the word. Needless to say, you must be able to understand what you hear. Does anyone think that God condemns people to hell for being born with a sinful nature? Did they have any choice in the matter? No, but because of it they WILL sin and for THAT, they need salvation. Before a person knows there is such a thing as sin, their sins are not held against them (and everyone is given a conscience, so they will eventually know unless they have a mind of a young child for their entire lifetime, as sometimes happens). Babies who were not baptized do not go to hell. That would be works, and more so, relying on works done TO them, completely out of their control--the same way their birth was. So why do people baptize them when they are utterly unaware of what is happening, and unable to "follow" Christ, they have not yet sinned (they do not know right from wrong yet), they cannot understand the Word when they hear it, and so on? The Bible does not say, "be baptized and believe," but to "believe and be baptized."

If no one has free will to accept or reject God's grace, then why does the Bible repeatedly exhort everyone to BELIEVE and not harden your heart against God? Do infants harden their hearts? How can you refrain from hardening your heart if you have no free will? (I think we can all testify to the existence of free will every single day.) So no, rather than DOING something (such as being baptized, taking the Lord's Supper, or doing good works), you CEASE your rebellion against God in RESPONSE to the message of the Gospel, which is His gracious offer of eternal life, of having Jesus' completed work of salvation applied to you personally. Knowing that God loves you inspires you to love Him in return. Once you realize how amazing and wonderful He is, you don't WANT to resist Him anymore. He DRAWS you to Himself, by His grace, despite the fact that not ONE of us deserves it. It is not works to RECEIVE a gift that was freely offered and given. God does not force anyone to accept it (nor does He force anyone to obey Him after they receive His gifts).

Make no mistake, EVERY knee will bow and EVERY tongue will confess Jesus as Lord. At that point, compliance WILL be forced, but it will not result in salvation. God allows people to cause Him frustration and pain in order to receive TRUE

worship from those are WILLING to humble themselves and admit He is God and they are not. He wants obedience out of love (and a healthy dose of respect) from those who recognize His sovereignty and perfect, beautiful nature. There are examples of God granting freedom to choose to grieve Him at the time of Noah, every time the Israelites provoked Him to jealousy with their idols, at the cross and everything leading up to it, and when we are told as believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

Before you surrendered to God in the war your spirit was waging against Him, you were hostile to God. You basically wanted to be in charge, which is to BE God--there was no hope of overcoming this world or of eternal life for you. The hope of glory is Christ IN you. When you received (and accepted rather than rejecting as you may have done in the past when offered) the gifts of faith and forgiveness, you became a child of God, His treasured possession to do good works He prepared for you in advance, that His Father may be glorified--to "work in His vineyard" and "bear fruit." At that point, your treasure was to have begun being kept in heaven for you eternally, where your heart (Jesus) is, not on earth, continuing to value temporary things. You were to begin seeking the kingdom of God FIRST.

The parables Jesus told warned that it would appear that His return has been "delayed," but that you should keep watching and be ready--found faithfully serving Him, pleasing Him not yourself and/or other people who draw your attention and devotion away from Him. He wants you to be kind to strangers, love your enemies, feed the poor, defend widows and orphans, pray unceasingly, give Him thanks in everything, work at everything you do as though it were for Him (because it is) and share the Good News--to be the light and salt of the earth. He said with good reason to "count the cost," because He was serious when He said "carry your cross" if you want to follow Him and be found worthy. Why would you want to live in such a way that casts doubt that you possess saving faith or that you recognize His infinite worthiness of all that you could ever offer Him? If you claimed to love and respect any person on earth, would they believe you if you didn't follow it up with your actions? Can God be fooled?

God is a consuming fire. He has given ALL out of love for you, and He is not interested in lukewarm "love" in return. You can choose to give Him the leftover crumbs of your life if you want, but I say with certainty that you will regret it. He is preparing unimaginably wonderful things for those who love Him. He is worthy and EVERY knee will bow, EVERY tongue will confess that He is Lord. Behave like you believe it if you claim to be His. Keep your lamp lit and live like He is returning soon. You'll be glad you did.

NOTE: I have used "you" instead of "we" in this article to make it more personal for each of us who read it, not to "point the finger." This applies to ALL of us who believe. This is not meant to hammer anyone over the head, but to inspire us all to remember from moment to moment that it matters. When we don't live up to our calling, it not only represents our Savior to the world in a bad light, but it may discourage other believers from doing as they should as well. Let's be prepared to hold our heads up high when we see Him face to face and not shrink back in shame at His coming. We are told in the Bible to encourage one another in this way.

I normally compile a multitude of corresponding Scriptures to go with what I have said. I am not going to do that just now, but perhaps I will come back and add them later. In the meantime, this is the same message as I always present and the same Bible verses apply. To point you in the right direction as a starting point, you could read John chapters 14-17 and Revelation chapters 1-3, 22.

Lord, please help us to do only Your will and all of Your will. Apart from You, we are nothing and can do nothing. Please mold and shape us into vessels worthy of service to You, our very heart. Your love redeemed us and Your strength enables us to serve You as we should and to put You first in our lives. We want what You want and love who You love. Help us to recognize evil and flee from it. Let us hate everything sinful, giving it no place in our lives, and love what is good and pleasing to You. We ask You to make something beautiful out of each of us to glorify Your wonderful name. Please make us like You, faithful, true, steadfast, loving, long-suffering, strong, persevering, brave, wise and holy, fit to be Yours, worthy of You and the price You paid for us. All of our hope is in You. Thank you for forgiving and cleansing us. Oh, how we love You! If we have any idols in our lives, please show us and help us to tear them down. Please make us lights in this dark world and draw us near to You, keeping us firmly in Your love as we revere You above all, adoring and worshiping You until Your (hopefully soon) return, and forevermore. Amen

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