

Radical Love

by Tricia Berg

*"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**" Matthew 11:27-30*

I have a radical thought. We know that Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant Law for us, right? (Matt. 5:17) But what about this—if we truly do obey the first and greatest commandment to love God most, first, best, highest, then **Jesus** will fulfill the second greatest commandment, love your neighbor as yourself, for us as well. How? Because it is HIS Spirit within us who produces the fruits that lead to the love needed to carry out that command, which fulfills ALL of the rest of the law. This is also referred to as the Law of Liberty, the Royal Law and the Golden Rule, but we need to bear in mind these are God's rules. They are NOT meant to be permission to sin. There was a lot more to the Mosaic Law than refraining from evil. We are free of the rituals that were a foreshadow of Jesus' perfect sacrifice. We have not been set "free" so that we can continue in the sin Jesus paid the penalty for with His precious blood. (Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-10, James 2:8-12, James 1:19-27, Matt. 7:12-29, 1Cor. 6:12-13, 1Cor. 10:23-24, Col. 2:16-17) That was meant to be our dim past as unbelievers, not our bright future as believers.

We can see by the context of the passage at the top that what is meant by taking on His yoke and casting our burdens on Him is to accept FREE salvation from Him rather than trying to work for it (Acts 15:10), and to rely on HIS strength to obey God so that we can abide IN Him and bear fruit, for apart from HIM we can do NOTHING. (John 15:4-5) We can't save ourselves, and we are not able to keep the "royal law" perfectly either. If we claim to be born again and yet unable to resist temptation and turn from sin, we are really saying that HE hasn't done what He promised to do. Since that is absolutely not true, the fault must lie with US—perhaps with a misplacement of OUR affections. He will indwell and help each one who LOVES Him. (John 14:15-24)

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps***

his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 2:3-6

By this my Father is glorified, that you **bear much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. **Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. John 15:8-14

I wish we could just all agree on this and put it into practice rather than arguing about theology and the meanings of various terms. God warned us against quarreling, including over words, and tearing one another apart. I do not mean we should accept the false teachings of others if they accept ours. I mean that the Gospel is very simple and people have complicated it. Jesus said little children can understand, but these days many of us think people need a seminary degree to share the Gospel. (Matt. 11:25-26) We are all part of a royal priesthood, yet we place all of the duties on a few men and shirk our own responsibilities. (1Pet. 2:9) We don't trust people unless they have the proper "credentials."

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;** against such things there is no law. And **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:13-26

However, Paul said that in the early church gatherings, "each one" was to have a revelation, psalm, teaching, etc. (1Cor. 11:26) Participation was not limited to one or a few people, but what they said was to be weighed against the Scriptures and prayerful consideration. (1Cor. 14:29-32, Acts 17:11) Leaders were to have enough "time under their belt" as believers that their fruits could be observed and so they won't become puffed up by being given the honor. (1Tim. 3:1-13) But there is a difference between shepherding a flock and contributing in a meaningful way (not merely repeating words back) to a gathering of the church (which today, the building or worship service is usually called "church," but the Church is the *gathering* of believers, not limited only to worship services, but applicable to any time believers gather to glorify God.)

I am afraid that based on how we manage the affairs of the Church these days, we would have REJECTED the qualifications of the apostles by today's standards—"uneducated" fishermen? (But they learned directly from Jesus.) Even Paul, who had been the student of a great Jewish teacher of the time, did not learn a good deal of what He needed to know for His God-given ministry at school. (Acts 22:3, Gal. 1:11-12) "The anointing within us teaches and guides us." Most definitely that Scripture has been thrown by the wayside out of fear that people will not be discerning enough and possibly even run after dreams and visions originating from who knows where—but God said through John that the Holy Spirit (anointing) helps us ABIDE and keeps us FROM straying off the narrow path. People are trying to walk that road by listening to teachers (some of whom are NOT anointed), who are either leaving out the part about HOW to abide (by HIS power), or sometimes saying it is not necessary to abide at all!

*No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.** I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But **the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, **abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.**** 1 John 2:23-29*

Not many should be teachers. (James 3:1) Women should not teach men. (1Tim. 2:12) What happened to putting these into practice? Do we "know better" now what works and what doesn't? Jesus doesn't have a say in the

running of His own Body? (2Tim. 3:16-17) Isn't He still the Head of the Church? (Eph. 1:3-23, Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:13-23, Heb. 2:7-9) I realize that many congregations are trying to hold fast to the Head, but some have broken loose, apparently thinking that God changes with the times. (2Pet. 2) Jesus asked why people call Him "Lord" if they don't do what He says. Some will claim to have done miracles in His name and yet He will tell them He "never knew them." (Matt. 7:15-29, Luke 6:43-49)

Education is very useful, but we live in a society where everyone has to be an expert to be trusted. Many make exaggerated claims, and there are licenses for just about everything. I just read that only licensed vets can render aid to animals, even in an emergency? (This was in an article about how EMTs are frequently asked to help save pets at the scene of a fire—and thankfully, most do what they can despite not having a "license.") Some of these restrictions are for our protection, and some of them are to protect the livelihood of those who make their living doing those things. Let's not make evangelism one of those professions.

The Bible warns about making a shameful profit, especially by telling people lies, but rather, those called to preach the TRUTH are to make a reasonable living, not get rich. (Gal. 6:6, 1Cor. 9:3-11) Our treasure is in heaven. (Matt. 6:19-21, Matt. 19:21, Matt. 25:34-40, 1Cor. 2:9, Col. 1:11-20, Col. 3:23-24, Eph. 1:15-23, James 2:5, 1Pet. 1:3-5) The rich who die without repenting will find they have received all of the good things they will ever receive, for eternity. (Luke 16:19-31, Matt. 19:23, Luke 6:24-25, Luke 14:12-14, James 5:1-6) For those who have gotten rich through telling people lies and faking miracles in the name of Jesus, I'm afraid they will be tragically included in those told by Jesus, "I never knew you, depart from Me."

What a beautiful place the world would be if people really loved God and believed that His way is BEST, that He hears and sees all they do and even knows their thoughts. He is a LOVING God. There is no need to fear if everything we do is out of love for Him and our neighbor, but if we cast His ways aside, we SHOULD be afraid. That is the WISE thing to do in that case. It's for our GOOD that we should recognize the danger of going against Him and turn back TO Him. That ideal world with peace and harmony WILL come to be when Jesus returns to reign during the millennium, and those of us who love Him (not who are "perfect"), cannot WAIT! But prior to that, a LOT of scary things are going to happen.

The wrath of God is coming on the "sons of disobedience." (Eph. 5:3-12) God's people will be hidden from His wrath (not necessarily man's - Zeph. 2:3) and

those who have been deemed "called, chosen and faithful" will return WITH Jesus. (Rev. 17:14) What a glorious thing to look forward to. Isn't that enough to inspire each of us to really give ALL of ourselves for God's glory and be READY when He returns? If we believe He died for our sins, then don't we also believe that He is WORTHY of giving up those sins in order to please Him? If we really believe that we have an unimaginably wonderful inheritance waiting for us in heaven, can we really put much importance anymore in the worthless things of this temporary world? (Eph. 1:11-23, 1Pet. 1:3-25)

We each have to answer for ourselves. One thing we need to keep in mind, though, is that the broad path is easy and leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13-29, Luke 13:22-30) So looking around us to see what everyone else is doing won't help us. This is one instance where "asking the audience" (like on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire) is NOT a good idea. The majority are blinded by the "god of this world," and at present, Satan is being allowed to hold that position. (Eph. 2:1-3, 2Cor. 4:1-5, John 8:42-47, 2Cor. 11:13-15) It will only get worse for those who think they are too clever to humble themselves and believe in God. (2Thess. 2:9-11, Rev. 13) The rest of us need to be WISE and obey God, not men. (Acts 5:27-42, Gal. 1:10, Matt. 24:36-25:46, Heb. 10:32-39)

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Jesus has gone to receive His kingdom to Himself. (Luke 19:11-27) All power HAS been given to Him, but as yet, we do not see Him fully exercising it—but He will, when the time is right. (Matt. 28:18, Rev. 11:15-19, Heb. 2:5-9 - see 1Kings 1 and 1Chron. 29 for a foreshadow of this, where Solomon was crowned king and given power to rule prior to fully exercising it.) We who love Him are an important part of the possession of the King of kings and Lord of lords. We are a portion of the “joy set before Him” and “satisfaction of His soul” (Heb. 12:1-2, Isa. 53:11) There are seals on the “deed” to His possession that only He has the right to remove. (Jer. 32, Rev. 5-6, Ruth 3-4, Luke 4:14-30, Isaiah 61, Lev. 25:8-34, Titus 2:11-15, 1Pet. 2:9-12, Mal. 3:16-19, Ex. 19:5-6 - we are grafted in to Israel - Rom. 11, 1Pet. 1:8-9, John 17:6, 1Cor. 6:19-20, Rev. 5:9, Rev. 19:1-10) One of the many ways in which Jesus is referred to in the Bible is “Shiloh,” which means “He to Whom it belongs” or “He whose it is.” (Gen. 49:10) He will gather to Himself all of those who are His prior to the bowls of God's wrath being poured out, but will not return fully to earth at that time—those who died abiding IN Him and those still alive will meet Him in the clouds. (1Thess. 4:16-18, 1Cor. 15:23, 1Cor. 15:51-52)

While God’s wrath is being poured out on the earth, those who are His will go to their chambers (John 14:2-3), during which time the temple in heaven will be filled with smoke and no one will be able to enter. (Rev. 15:1-8, Isa. 26:20-21) Jesus warned the churches in Rev. 2-3 that they must correct deficiencies in their walk with Him if they want to escape the hour of trial and receive great and glorious promises. (Heb. 6:9-12, 1John 1:6, 1John 2:4-6) The reign of the beast is NOT God's wrath but Satan's—God's people do not endure HIS wrath. (Rev. 11:1-2, Rev. 12:10-12, 1Thess. 5:9, Rom. 5:9) That is the “hour” when the beast reigns and forces all to worship the beast and take a mark to buy and sell. (Rev. Rev. 13:5-10, Rev. 17:12, Dan. 7:25-27, Dan. 12:7, Rev. 10:1-7, Dan. 9:24, Dan. 11:32-35)

There will be MANY martyrs among those who were not ready (had not maintained the flame of their lamps - Psalm 119:105, Matt. 25:8; had not resisted sin by submitting themselves fully to Him - Rom. 8:7-8, Rom. 10:3, Jam. 4:7-10; had not allowed themselves to be purified and refined through suffering for His sake - 1Pet. 1:6-9, Rom. 8:16-19; had let their salt become tasteless - Matt. 5:13, Rev. 11:1-2) when God provided a way out of the trial and temptation. (Rev. 3:10) That “test” is to endure through a period that is “scheduled” to last 42 months. Those who are alive ON EARTH at that time (Rev. 12:10-12, Rev. 3:10, Rev. 6:10, Rev. 8:13, Rev. 11:10, Rev. 13:8-10, 13:14, Rev. 14:6) must resist being tempted to become a child of the devil in order to physically survive. (1Cor. 10:6-22, Luke 21:12-19, Mark 9:49-50, Luke

11:33-36, Rev. 14:9-13, Rev. 6:9-11) MANY will literally lose their lives to gain them. (Matt. 10:39)

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "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 will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?** For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:24-27*

The end of the reign of the beast coincides with the "full number of martyrs" coming in at the end of the tribulation, before the beginning of God's wrath. (Matt. 24:29, Joel 2:30-31, Rev. 6:12-17, Rev. 15) Clearly the reward for being a martyr is great, but no one would choose it if it could be avoided. The deception during that time is going to be so convincing as to trick even believers. (Matt. 24:24, Mark 13:22, Rev. 13:13-14, 2Thess. 2:9-12) The fact that the foolish virgins in Matt. 25:1-13 came back, presumably having "purchased oil," but Jesus STILL didn't know them is extremely disturbing. It would seem that they were not able to "buy" the real thing, which is not surprising, since you can't buy the faith that comes from hearing the word. (Rom. 10:17, Psalm 119:105) But the fact they appear to have bought something may mean they took the mark of the beast? I don't know, but I know for sure is that the time to be READY is now.

Let me "give it to you straight." If we say we have no time to read our Bibles so that we can get to know better the One who loved our souls enough to die for us, but we DO have time to watch reality TV, sports, sitcoms, award shows, crime shows, etc.—there is something wrong. That is NOT love for our Savior. That is choosing to squander our precious time, which is a gift from Him on something WORTHLESS instead of investing it in a way that will build up our faith and prepare us for what's to come, in a way that will help CLOTHE us with His armor so that we can be READY to stand firm in our faith no matter what happens. (Eph. 6:10-20)

When we read our Bibles for ourselves, we safeguard ourselves from casting off our garment of salvation. (2Cor. 5:4) We received faith as a gift when we heard the Good News. (Rom. 10:17) If we never hear it again, or rarely hear it, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, we are NOT ready for the BATTLE against the unseen forces that want to lead us away like willing prisoners. If we don't abide IN Jesus AND HIS WORDS, might we go astray and let our "lamps" go out. (Matt. 5:10-16, Matt. 25:1-13, Luke 12:35-48) Remember how David went

into battle against Goliath trusting in God, not in King Saul's armor? We need to do that, too. David surely knew the word inside and out, as His many Psalms attest to.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can **extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one**. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And **pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests**. With this in mind, **be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people**. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. **Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.** Ephesians 6:10-20

By hearing the word regularly (and worship services vary greatly in length and content of Scripture - we don't have a healthy relationship with our spouses if we only spend time with them an hour a week, do we?), we are able to discern His will so that we can keep our spotless white garment of righteousness clean. Jesus warned us that it IS possible to soil it. (Rom. 12:1-2, Rev. 3:4, James 1:27, 2Pet. 2:22, Rev. 22:14-15) Let's get this one very important thing clear. Those who do not believe do NOT have ON a garment of salvation. (Matt. 22:1-14) So those who are being warned to WASH theirs are those who have SOILED them after receiving them from Jesus. (Rom. 13:14)

This is a BIG DEAL. This is about inheriting the kingdom of God! (Rev. 21:6-7) Jesus said repeatedly in His earthly ministry that it costs our LIFE, which most importantly consists our our laying down OUR will and taking up HIS. (2Cor. 5:14-15) He is NOT making up His TREASURED possession out of half-hearted people who love the world. (James 5:7-10, Col. 1:21-23, 1John 2:15-16, James 4:4, Mal. 3:16-18) The promises were made TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (1Cor. 2:9, Philip. 3:17-19, James 1:12, James 2:5, Heb. 6:9-12, Heb. 10:23-39)

We can see an example of what should be our attitude toward giving to God below. Notice they were giving gold and precious stones for the building of the temple, just like Paul talks about in 1Cor. 3:10-17? Those making the offerings were asked if they were willing to CONSECRATE themselves to the Lord.

"Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?"
*Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work **gave willingly**. They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of **gold**, ten thousand talents of **silver**, eighteen thousand talents of bronze and a hundred thousand talents of iron. Anyone who had **precious stones** gave them to the treasury of the temple of the LORD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. **The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.** 1 Chronicles 29:5-9*

When we relate the above passage to this next verse, it reminds us of how everything we have has first come from God, both physical resources and gifts of the Holy Spirit—ALL to be used for His glory. This was when the materials to build the temple were being dedicated to God. Today, we believers are being built the temple of God. He dwells IN US.

*[King David said] "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? **For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.**" 1 Chronicles 29:14*

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone**, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, **grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.** Ephesians 2:19-22*

*Now **there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between*

*spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. **All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.** 1 Corinthians 12:4-11*

Another example of the kind of devotion God expects and deserves is Caleb (who is repeatedly referred to as following God with his WHOLE heart - Numb. 14:24, Num. 32:12, Deut. 1:36, Josh. 14:14) being the only Israelite over the age of 20 at the time of the exodus from Egypt, who FOLLOWED Joshua (representing Jesus, their names even have the same meaning) into the Promised Land. He didn't just SAY He believed God, but he acted upon that belief and thereby proved his faith to be genuine, as did those in James' examples of saving faith. (James 2:18-26, 1Pet. 1:6-7, Luke 9:23)

I am not saying that if we make one slip-up, we'll go to hell. Not at all. He is faithful to forgive ANY sin we repent of, even repeatedly (but it is not "repenting" to continue in it deliberately). (1John 1:5-10, Heb. 7:25, Matt. 18:21-35, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2, 5) There is a second resurrection after the first, one before and one after the millennium. However, those who are part of the FIRST resurrection are the most blessed. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and loved HIM more than their lives. (Rev. 7:9-17, Rev. 12:10-12, Rev. 15:2, Rev. 2:10-11, Rev. 20:6, Luke 20:35-36, Philip. 3:7-16, Luke 14:25-35, John 12:25-26)

Some will enter the kingdom "as through the fire," having had all of their works burnt up ("works" include both our thoughts, words and actions and what we normally consider "good deeds"). (1Cor. 3:10-17) Those who took the gifts of the Spirit (including skills, talents, helpful personality traits, etc.) and resources (time, strength, money, etc.) provided by their Master to "make Him a profit" ("bear fruit," "increase His harvest of souls" - Matt. 9:37-38) and spent them on themselves rather than investing in His kingdom will see someone else get the rewards that would have been theirs. (Matt. 25:14-30) They will be SO glad to enter in, though, because they truly believed in Jesus as their Savior (despite being deceived by the "treasures of the world" into making poor, temporary investments instead of eternal ones). (John 3:16-21, John 5:24, John 6:47, Acts 13:48, 1Tim. 1:16, 1John 5:13, Matt. 6:19-34, 1John 2:15-16, James 4:4)

(It is my belief that the "last day" when "all who believe" (and indeed, ALL - John 5:28-29, Dan. 12:2) - apart from "overcoming" by loving Jesus more than their own lives - will be resurrected is after the millennial reign. John 6:39-40, Rev. 20:7-15 The millennial reign is the seventh "1,000-year day" of "Sabbath rest," which also fulfills the Feast of Tabernacles. Josh. 1-5, Heb. 4 I believe that the "last, great day" of that feast will be fulfilled when the sun and moon

are no longer needed and that "last day" continues forever. John 7:37, Rev. 22:5, Rev. 22:17)

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:3-11

*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*

I like to think of "the measure that we use" (Mark 4:13-25, Luke 6:20-49) as if we each have been given an alabaster flask of expensive nard like Mary of Bethany and the other unnamed woman had (one poured hers out on His feet and the other anointed His head). (Matt. 26:7-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8, John 11:2) We only get the ONE flask and it's entirely up to our discretion how we will use it. (2Cor. 4:7-11) Will we arrive in heaven tightly clinging to that bottle, unopened, because we couldn't part with it? (Matt. 25:18 Matt. 25:25, Matt. 5:13-16) Maybe we were afraid to be without our own comfort and security, even for His precious sake? (Matt. 8:20-22, Matt. 6:24-34) Maybe we were saving it for a rainy day or waiting for its value to increase so we could sell it for a large sum? (Luke 12:15-21) Judas claimed to want to sell Mary's bottle of nard and use the proceeds to help the poor, but he was lying. (John 12:4-6)

Maybe no one around us seemed to think it mattered, and we trusted their judgment more than the advice in the Bible? That would definitely be easier and less awkward—wouldn't want to be one of "those people," who get "carried away"—how embarrassing! (Mark 8:36-38, Matt. 7:13-14) Or will we pour the entire flask of nard out on Jesus' precious feet like Mary did, not caring what anyone else thought? Remember, both women were scolded by others for "wasting" their nard, but commended by Jesus. Will we use ALL of it, or just a few drops? Mary's many sins were forgiven, just like ours. The "nard" is EVERYTHING in our life—our time, talents, finances, devotion, any and all resources at our disposal. We are not even meant to love our earthly families or our own lives more than God (Matt. 20:37-39)—if we do, they are idols to us—let alone our jobs, possessions, social status, etc. If there were such a thing as "celebrities" among the saints in heaven, they would be the martyrs.

I'm telling you this truly from the bottom of my heart—we will all CARE whether Jesus is pleased with the measure of LOVE we gave Him in RETURN for what He has done for us when we stand before Him. Once we see with our own eyes how beautiful, how glorious, how WORTHY is our loving Savior, it will be too late to change anything. How will we feel when we see how He STILL loves us despite our failing Him? (Both relieved and painfully remorseful come to mind.) How will we feel when we see our works all burned up? The works we did instead of the ones that would have given Him glory, and pleasure to reward us for. How will we feel when we see WHY we were told not to unwisely choose to invest in temporary pleasures instead of treasure in heaven? Those who "shine like the stars," and those who don't will do so for eternity. (Dan. 12:2-4, James 5:19-20)

Choose wisely NOW. It's never too late. We can't go back and correct mistakes in the past, but we can live for Him starting now. We can pray that He will make good come out of even the foolish, selfish things we did when we didn't recognize His infinite value, and we went along with the world. (Rom. 8:26-28) He knows our weaknesses and He still loves us. In fact, I noticed something reassuring about the parable of the servants. There is NO example of a servant doing his best to invest what his Master entrusted to him who ended up being reprimanded! There are only examples of commendations given to the faithful and a severe chastening to the one who didn't invest AT ALL. The "increase" (fruit) is produced by Him according to the measure of our faith. The more we abide in Him, the more fruitful we will be. Let's do that, thanking and praising Him with all that we have inside of us, with all that we are, for how wonderful He is! (2Cor. 12:10, Philip. 4:10-19)

I have found that the more I treasure His word, the more He (by His indwelling Spirit of Truth, the Helper - John 14:15-17, 26) shows me things that I hadn't noticed before, reminds me of scriptural truths I had forgotten, and even illuminates how various Scriptures go together like He did for the disciples on the Road to Emmaus (but He doesn't "remind" us of Scriptures that we have never read, does He?) He doesn't hide from us when we seek Him in this age where we are His dwelling place, and where Jew and Gentile are being built together into one body. (Rev. 13:6, Col. 1:24-29, 1Cor. 3:16-17, 1Pet. 2, James 1:5-8, Hos. 5:15, Amos 8:11-12, Isa. 54:7-8, Deut. 4:29-31) See more later on this amazing miracle that God is doing among the Gentiles. This was foretold in Deut. 32:21 and Isa. 49:6, and fulfilled in Acts 28:28.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—***remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one*** and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might ***create in himself one new man in place of the two***, so making peace, and might ***reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross***, thereby killing the hostility. And ***he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*** So then you are ***no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household***

of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:1-22 (Also see Rev. 21:9-14)

We have a rare privilege—the chosen people (the Jews - Rom. 9:4-5) are being chastised for their disobedience by being partially blinded in sight and hardened in heart, and salvation has been offered to the Gentiles to make them jealous. (Rom. 11:11) We are being GRAFTED IN to Israel—not replacing—and we are warned to tread lightly or we can be “un-grafted.” (Eph. 3:1-12, Rom. 10:19-21, Rom. 2:28-29) The Church has the FIRSTFRUITS of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 8:23, 2Thess. 2:13, James 1:18) When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, the Jews will be unblinded so that they can see that Jesus is the Messiah they rejected. (Matt. 13:13-17, Luke 13:31-35, Luke 19:41-44, Matt. 23:37-39, Rev. 1:7, Matt. 24:30, Zech. 12:10-14) Then they will circumcise their hardened hearts and enter into the New Covenant as we already have. (Deut. 10:12-21, Deut. 30, Rom. 10:6-13, Col. 2:6-15)

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just

as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:17-36

Don't miss your chance! The "deadline" on this unfathomably great offer to the Gentiles (and few unhardened, believing Jews) is known only to God. (Heb. 3:5-19, Luke 13:25-30, Rev. 3:7-13, Rev. 3:20, Isa. 22:20-24, 2Tim. 2:19-22) I can't claim to know what happens after that, but I don't believe that God phrased it "fullness of the Gentiles" for no reason. And don't think for a minute that "abiding" is not necessary for those who have already accepted the offer. What else does "stand fast through faith" and "continue in His kindness" in the above passage mean? (Luke 8:15, 1Cor. 15:1-2, Heb. 3:5-6, Heb. 10:23, Rev. 2:10, Rev. 2:25, Rev. 3:3, Rev. 3:11) That is the same as "abide in my love" from John 15:9-10. We are being conformed into Jesus' image by His Spirit within us. (Rom. 8:9, 29) If we think that He enjoys participating in sins with us, since we are His dwelling place, then we don't know Him at all. (1John 3:6, 1Cor. 6:15-20)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, **do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**" It is for discipline that **you have to endure.** God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines

us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet,** so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;** that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**; that no one is **sexually immoral or unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."** This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us **offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:1-29

One of the reasons these are such perilous times is that society has modified some of the patterns that God uses to teach us about our relationship to Him. The biblical example of parent and child, as well as husband and wife, with love, respect and obedience, has been blurred—as predicted. (2Tim. 3:1-7, Matt. 6:32, Isa. 3:12, Prov. 12:4) The biblical examples of faithfulness in marriage were meant to teach us about God's faithfulness to us, and us to Him, as well as the intimate nature of the relationship (as designed by Him, His perfect way—not to be modified by man's sinful desire to "update" it). (Matt. 19:3-6 - "hold fast," "two become one," Eph. 5:22-32, 1Cor. 6:15-20, Jer. 31:31-37)

With rampant unfaithfulness in marriage, easy divorce and confusion about God's intentional design of and plan for gender, the lesson our Creator is teaching us is lost on people in modern times. We think it's okay to "play God" and change what He has done, even though He has clearly told us what He desires. (Mal. 2:13-16)

The warnings in the Bible are for "those with an ear to hear." (Parable of the Sower, shining our light - Mark 4:9, 4:23, Luke 8:8; salt of the earth - Luke 14:35; letters to the Churches - Rev. 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22; warning about perseverance needed in the hour of trial - Rev. 13:9) In general, there are two classes of people who can't "hear" these warnings. The first is those of Israel who are hardened of heart. (Deut. 29:4, Ezek. 12:2, Matt. 11:12-15) The second is those who have willfully and persistently decided to go their own way instead of God's. (Rom. 1:18-32, 1Tim. 4:1-2, Jer. 32:33)

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster." Proverbs 1:20-33 (See also Rom. 1:18-32)

*"Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. **Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find***

knowledge and discretion. **The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.** Proverbs 8:6-13

"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 66:3-6

Just like a plant blossoms when you nurture it, so does our faith and the love in our hearts for our Savior when we immerse ourselves in His word, in worship, in prayer, and in thankful praise. Jesus warned the believers at Ephesus that the love they once had had grown cold. He warned those at Laodicea that their love for Him was lukewarm, neither hot or cold. (Rev. 2:4, Rev. 3:15-20) That is a repulsive thought when you consider the depths of the love it took for Jesus to suffer horrifically and lay down His life for us. (Isa. 53, Psalm 22) Doesn't the thought of it bring tears to your eyes? It does mine.

The more we know our Savior, the more we love Him and want to know Him more, want to know what His will is and want to DO whatever that is. It's not complicated. Just as His "yoke is easy" in the passage at the top, His commands are not burdensome, because we love Him. It's time to wake up and decide what and who is important. The world at large is utterly blind in this department, so we need to be sure to look to the Bible for guidance instead. Just remember that the radical kind of love we have received calls for a radical response.

*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

"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.**" There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. **So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."** Jesus answered them, "**I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.**" The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews

answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? **If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**" Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. John 10:1-39

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, **according to his power that is at work within us,** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

For **this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.** And his commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3

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