

Rod of Discipline or Spirit of Gentleness

by Tricia Berg

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? 1 Corinthians 4:21

The above verse continues on in the next "chapter" (which is sad, since there were no chapters in the original text, and that is not a good place to break) as follows:

*It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality** among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are proud! **Ought you not rather to mourn?** Let him who has done this be **removed from among you**. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, **I have already pronounced judgment** on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to **deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord**. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you **not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one**. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? **Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?** God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." 1 Corinthians 5:1-13*

This is the SAME Paul who WARNED people (as did Jesus) NOT to be hypocrites and try to pass judgment on others while making a practice of sin themselves. (Rom. 2:1-11, Luke 6:42-43) So we can be SURE that the Corinthians were not told to ONLY deal with this sin issue and let all of the others pass (including other forms of sexual immorality—in fact, Paul admonishes them repeatedly on this topic - 1Cor. 5:11, 6:9, 13, 18, 7:2, 10:8, 2Cor. 12:21). That would be contradictory. No, ALL sexual immorality is out of place for members of the

Body of Christ. The reason for my continual emphasis on this particular sin among so many others is because that's the battle chosen by today's blinded society. (Luke 6:39, 1Cor. 2:14, Rom. 1:21, Eph. 4:18)

*Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you **abstain from sexual immorality**; that each one of you know how to **control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God**; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because **the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you**. For God has **not called us for impurity, but in holiness**. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
1 Thessalonians 4:1-8*

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the **marriage bed be undefiled**, for **God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous**.
Hebrews 13:4 (Also see Mark 10:6-9.)*

*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has **ceased from sin**, so as to **live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God**. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, **living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry**. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but **they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead**. 1 Peter 4:1-5*

Paul talks about preferring to use his authority to build up, not tear down. One kind of works that must be torn down would be building on another foundation than Jesus. He admonishes them not to accept a "different Jesus" (2Cor. 11:2-4). However, he ALSO expresses his dismay at the necessity of tearing down works that HAVE been built on the foundation of Christ (so these are believers) BUT with inferior materials—like "straw" instead of with valuable materials like "gold and precious gems." That's not giving our BEST to Jesus, who suffered and died for us. (2Cor. 5:14-21). The way we live is to be a spiritual "sacrifice" to God. (Rom. 12:1-2, 6:5-13, Gal. 2:20, 1Pet. 2:4-5, 4:1-5) We are told that some will enter in "as through the fire" without further reward for their faithfulness as believers. Worse yet, others will have it revealed that their

spiritual “father” is NOT God, but the devil. (John 8:44, 1John 3:8-10, 5:18, Phil. 3:18-19, John 1:12-13) Some will NOT be known by Jesus. (Luke 6:43-45, 46-49, 13:23-30, Matt. 7:15-20, 21-23, 24-29, 25:1-13, Heb. 3:12-15, 12:14, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 2:11)

*For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I **may not have to be severe** in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me **for building up and not for tearing down**. 2 Corinthians 13:10 (Also see 2Cor. 7:8-10; 1Tim. 1:5.)*

*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**. Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For **God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple**. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 1 Corinthians 3:10-18 (Also see 1Pet. 2:4-13.)*

Is Paul just “picking on” the Corinthians, because deep down he just doesn’t like them? NO. He makes that abundantly clear. (2Cor. 11:11) He wants everyone to be on the same page so that the focus can be on sharing the gospel and making disciples (who FOLLOW Jesus, not just “like” Him as though He were a Facebook fan page). (1Cor. 1:10, Eph. 4:1-3, 13-14, Matt. 28:19-20) But Paul knows that in order to be TRUE to his God-given ministry (Rom. 11:13, Acts 9:15), he has to deal with the unpleasant issue of sin. Jesus’ Body is to be pure and holy. (Gal. 1:4, Eph. 5:3, 25-27, Phil. 1:9-11, 1Thess. 5:23, Jude 1:24-25, 1Cor. 5:6-8) Only He can make it so, but we as members of His Body are to SUBMIT to His Spirit IN us. Paul has to resort to harsh words in order to get his point across (and these words are for US, too):

*Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and **all for your upbuilding, beloved**. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps*

there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and **I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.** 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I **will not spare them**—since you seek proof that **Christ is speaking in me.** He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!** 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:5

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. 1 Timothy 5:20-21

Or do you not know that the unrighteous **will not inherit the kingdom of God?** Do not be **deceived:** neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. **The body is not meant for sexual immorality,** but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!** Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. **Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?** You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So **glorify God in your body.** 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Recently, the founder of a mega-church said something to the effect of "grace doesn't point fingers." His actual wording (in one particular tweet—I suppose there were many) was: "Heaven will be filled with grace receivers who try to grasp the breadth of Christ's love - Not judgmental finger pointers." This was in response to someone's tweet quoting the Bible. So it's not enough that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, He needs to also allow us to continue in those sins in order to love us? Interesting. That's a very self-centered way to look at it—no wonder it's so popular in these evil days. Ask yourself this: Who would LOVE it if the Body of Christ were defiled by sexual sin? The answer is easy. Questioning what God "really said" is a trick that has worked for millennia (Gen. 3:1-5)

Looking at the passages previously quoted, you could easily say that Paul DOES "point the finger" even though he certainly knows ALL about GRACE (Eph. 2:5-10) What this mega-church "celebrity" and false teacher is saying is that "grace" LIES? "Grace" says that the Bible teaches that those who name the name of God as their Lord and Savior WILL enter the kingdom of God even if they don't repent, but rather continue to make a practice of what were to have been their FORMER sins? (Rom. 10:9-10, Eph. 5:23-24, 4:21-24, 2:1-3, Col. 3:5-10, Gal. 5:19-21, 1Cor. 6:9-10, Eph. 5:5-6, Rev. 21:8, 2Pet. 1:8-11, 1Pet. 1:14-19, Titus 3:3) When Paul said that we ARE to judge those inside the church, he was wrong? (1Cor. 5:12-13) When Jesus said to take the plank out of your own eye before helping your brother with his splinter, what did He mean? (Matt. 7:3-5) What about when Jesus said if your brother doesn't repent, then he is to be as a tax collector to you? (Matt. 18:15-17)

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:19-22

How can anyone say they know God and call Him a liar at the same time? (Num. 23:19, Psa. 50:21-23, 16-20, 94:8-13, Isa. 57:11, 29:15-16, Zeph. 1:12) That's exactly what they're doing when they "undo" His warnings in the Bible. How can they claim to LOVE Jesus and yet have no interest in OBEYING Him? (John 14:15, Mark 12:28-34, 1Thess. 4:2-5, 6-8) People who REFUSE to believe in Jesus, whether they practice the particular sins listed or not, are

already condemned. (John 3:18-21) That makes it abundantly clear that these statements are applicable to the CHURCH, since unbelievers cannot enter heaven simply by refraining from doing such things—THAT would be “works salvation.” (John 3:36) Those who belong to Jesus OBEY Him. (Rom. 16:19, 6:17-18, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 1Cor. 15:23) For verification, we can look at the words of Jesus through His angel to John in two of the letters to the churches.

*“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. **But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.** Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will **throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead.** And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. **The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end**, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ 3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. **Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who **have not soiled their garments**, and they will walk with me in **white**, for they are **worthy**. **The one who conquers** will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” Revelation 2:18-3:6 (Also see Jam. 1:27, 5:19-20, Jude 1:23, Gal. 6:1, 2Tim. 2:24-26.)*

Why do people listen to anyone who twists God's word? Either they genuinely just don't know better and are being deceived, or perhaps because they're hearing what they WANT to hear and refusing to submit to what GOD said. (Rom. 8:7-9, 1Tim. 4:7-8, 6:4-11, Jam. 4:7, 1Pet. 5:6-10, 2Pet. 3:11-14) Both Jesus and James said that it's not enough to just hear the word, but we need to DO what it says. (Matt. 7:24-27, John 14:24, John 15:10—also see Jam. 1:22-25, Matt. 22:36-40, Luke 8:21, Rev. 3:3-6) Are we ashamed of some of Jesus' words? (Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26) Or don't we know that the entire Bible was inspired by God, and that God is ONE? (2Tim. 3:14-17, John 10:30)

By the way, did you know that mega-churches (and their "front men"—and women, despite Paul's saying that women are not to teach men - 1Tim. 2:12) rake in a LOT of (tax-free) money? Does anyone think that Jesus (who cleansed the temple of money changers - Matt. 21:12-13) would approve of this "fleecing of the sheep"? Paul said NO.

*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*

*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. 2 Peter 2:1-3*

For certain people have **crept in** unnoticed who long ago were **designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4

Many people love the first part of the following passage, but love to leave out the rest (and also redefine what is "doing harm to a neighbor"—GOD decides what is wrong, not the current culture - Isa. 5:20-21, Psa. 97:10, Amos 5:15, Prov. 8:13, Matt. 18:5-6, 7-9, Rom. 16:19):

*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us **cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.** Romans 13:8-14 (Also see Gal. 5:16, 24-25; 1Thess. 4:6, Eph. 4:19-20, 1Pet. 4:3.)*

We believers are the temple of God in this age, and so the defiling of the temple is the defiling of our bodies. (1Cor. 6:19-20, 3:16-17) If it's "homo-phobic" (or these days, "trans-phobic") to quote Paul or Jesus from the Bible, then we're in good company. Jesus, you exclaim? YES, Jesus. He sent His angel to instruct John to write seven letters to the churches, telling them what displeases Him about their behavior (see the passage quoted earlier—Rev. 2:20-3:6), and including details of what will happen in the end times. Again, it's not that there is only one sin that God forbids His children from doing, but believers in this age have been deceived for multiple generations, by increasing permissiveness of the one sin that Paul said IS different from other sins. (1Cor. 6:18-20)

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

No, it's brave (not fearful) to tell the truth even when people hate to hear it—even when they take up their disapproval with the bearer of the message instead of with our sovereign God. It IS loving to care more about their souls than about our own comfort in this temporary world. (Matt. 5:10-16, Luke 6:22-23, John 15:18-21, 1John 4:5-6, 3:12-13, 2Tim. 3:12-13, 1Thess. 2:14) The FEAR comes in when people REJECT the truth, because we know that unless they change their thinking and behavior, they will NOT enter the kingdom of God. We who believe what God said are grieved over the deception that has people firmly in its grip during these treacherous times. (2Tim. 2:24-3:9, Phil. 2:15, Eph. 5:15-17, Col. 4:5-6) We can know that our generation is also twisted like those times described in the days of the early Church, because our society is increasingly accepting the same evil the Greeks and Romans did—despite having had many good aspects to their culture, such as their orderly justice systems. Nothing good comes out of it when people exalt the "wisdom" and ways of mankind and reject God's. (Rom. 1:18-32, 1Cor. 3:17-20, 16-17, Acts 17:21, 30-31, Isa. 3:9, Jude 1:7, 16, 2Pet. 2:2-3, 13-14, 18-19, 1Tim. 6:20-21)

WE know that there is nothing that this fallen world has to offer that could be worth giving up anything in the eternal kingdom. (1John 2:15-17, 2:28-3:10, Jam. 1:12, 4:4-10, 1Cor. 2:9, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Rev. 21:7-8) We know that it's tragic for anyone to perish—precious souls made in the image of God who could have been in heaven eternally offering praises and worship to God—**if only they had believed the truth instead of a lie**. (2Thess. 2:9-12, Rev. 22:15) The Bible warns us that people will not listen to sound doctrine during these times of difficulty, but will only want to have their "ears tickled" by people who tell them that sensuality and godliness are compatible.

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to **judge** the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, and exhort**, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when **people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths**. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 (Also see 2Tim. 3:1-5, 2Pet. 2, Jude 1:17-19, 4-16.)*

One of the problems with this issue is that so much compromise has already been made and accepted by society and even the church. It's good to recognize that it's hypocritical to single out certain sins, including certain forms of sexual immorality, yet look past the rest. However, the answer is NOT to declare them

all "acceptable." People who have no convictions about good or evil, truth or falsehood, holiness or filthiness can be easily convinced that God is pleased when they're accepting of sin. But Paul told the Corinthians they should mourn rather than be proud at continuing fellowship with a believer practicing sexual sin. (1Cor. 5:2) Jesus said this about "lukewarm Christians":

*"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will **spit you out of my mouth**. For you say, **I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **The one who conquers**, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Revelation 3:14-22*

It's NOT about what we have DONE—we've ALL fallen short. (Rom. 3:23, 5:12 Psa. 51:3-4) It's about what we continue to practice AFTER we have come to know the TRUTH. (Heb. 6:4-12, 10:26-39) ALL sins can be repented of, forgiven and washed clean thanks to Jesus' ONE sacrifice of Himself on our behalf. (John 10:18, 1John 1:6-8, 9-10, Heb. 9:24-28) We CAN slip, get back up and continue walking with Jesus, submitting to His Spirit IN us. (Gal. 5:24, Rom. 8:9, 13:14) But we can't fool God—He knows if we have no intention whatsoever of repenting. (Gal. 6:7-8) Blaming Him that He "made you that way" doesn't work, either. Adam tried to blame Eve, whom God gave him, for his OWN sin in the Garden of Eden. Guess what? He was still KICKED OUT. (Gen. 3:6, 12, 17-19, 23-24, Matt. 22:11-14, 25:11-13, 25:30, 13:40-43, 47-50, Rev. 3:4-6, 22:14-15) God does not tempt ANYONE, but He does ALLOW us to be tempted. (Jam. 1:12-13, 1Pet. 5:10, 1Cor. 10:13) We can and should LOVE everyone, but we are only to have sex within the relationship of a married man with his wife.

*But because of the **temptation to sexual immorality**, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 1 Corinthians 7:2*

God knows if we love our sin more than Him. It shows what the true condition of our heart is when we make our choice to obey righteousness or to obey sin. (Mark 7:21-23, Luke 6:43-45, Rom. 6) Is it regenerated or not? (Titus 3:3-8) This is not about becoming perfect the instant we believe, but there will be progress over time. (2Pet. 1:3-15) We will exhibit less and less behavior from the DO NOT DO list and more and more from the DO list. (Col. 3:5-4:5, Eph. 4:17-6:20, Gal. 5:16-6:10) This isn't "working for salvation," but rather, it's the evidence that the Holy Spirit is working IN us. (Phil. 2:12-16, Jam. 2:14-26, Eph. 2:10, 8-9)

Paul does caution us against being a "gong" (1Cor. 13:1-3), but nevertheless, that does NOT mean that "grace" LIES. Let's face it—those who champion this whole agenda don't want to HEAR the TRUTH. They consider everything they disagree with to be hate speech—but that's not what God said it is. He said that it IS loving to speak the truth. The ones making false claims that God "made" certain people in a way that He said He hates, in a way that is against nature, do NOT know God. (Titus 1:16, Phil. 3:18-19, 2Pet. 2:13-14) Why do they rebel against God by saying such things? Because it's profitable. (1Tim. 6:9-10) When you read in the Bible about Balak and Balaam's error, it was greed and inciting God's children to practice sexual immorality (this was BOTH physical AND spiritual.) (Num. 22-25, 31:16, 1Cor. 10:8, 2Pet. 2:14-16, Jude 1:10-23, Rev. 2:14)

*The **aim** of our charge is **love** that issues from a **pure** heart and a good **conscience** and a **sincere** faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, **without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions**. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the **ungodly and sinners**, for the **unholy and profane**, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the **sexually immoral**, men who **practice homosexuality**, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is **contrary to sound doctrine**, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. 1 Timothy 1:5-11 (Also see Jam. 3:1.)*

People who want to redesign biology according to their own preferences reject God's own testimony in the Bible. (2Tim. 3:16-17, Psa. 111:10, 119:105) It's yet another way of accusing God of lying. Furthermore, the argument that some animals engage in unnatural behavior is irrelevant. They were NOT made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27) (Additionally, I believe that many of those instances are not only caused by sin ruining the entire creation, but perhaps ALSO by

humans putting animals in crowded, unnatural habitats—and perhaps feeding them diets that do not promote normal states of health.) God said that He made only TWO genders, and marriage consists of a male and a female. (Gen. 5:1-2, 2:24-25, Matt. 19:4-6) A married couple is equipped with the necessary physical parts to be fruitful as God commanded (Gen. 1:28 - whether they do have children or not—the physical fruitfulness teaches us an important lesson about spiritual fruitfulness - Matt. 13:22, 2Pet. 1:8, Rom. 7:4-6, Gal. 5:21-25, Col. 1:10). There are no mismatches of one gender “identity” in a body of the wrong biological sex. No doubt some people are genuinely confused (and there are also birth defects at times), but that's a sad result of sin corrupting our entire world. (Rom. 1:18-32, 8:20-22)

*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 2:18-22

Rather, **speaking the truth in love**, we are to **grow up in every way** into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it **builds itself up in love**. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that **you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!**— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as **the truth is in Jesus**, to **put off your old self**, which belongs to your **former** manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to **put on the new self**, created after the likeness of God in **true righteousness and holiness**. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you **speak the truth** with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Ephesians 4:15-25

The truth sets us free because we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe the truth, and He (the Spirit of Truth - John 14:15-18) sets us free from being enslaved to sin. (John 8:31-36, Rom. 6, 2Pet. 2:19) He transforms our desires so that we want to know and do God's will instead of wanting to continue living in the sins that Jesus died to save us from. (Phil. 2:12-16) We're free from the penalty for our sins (which Jesus paid for on the cross) AND from having those desires control us (because of HIS Spirit IN us). We're "children of the promise" made to Abraham, who was called to go where God sent Him before the law was given to Moses. (Gal. 3:29, 4:31, Rom. 2:28-29, 4:12, 9:8, Heb. 11:8-16, John 4:22-24) As adopted children of God who have been grafted into Israel's "tree" (Rom. 11:17-25), we obey God like Abraham did (who was also not under the law)—not with empty words, but with actions—the same way that Noah, Enoch, and Abraham did, among MANY others who are given to us for examples. (Gen. 6:9, 17:1-8, Heb. 11:4-5, 17-40, 1Cor. 9:24-10:13, Job 1:1, 8, 2Tim. 2:19, Jam. 5:10-11) We walk with God, following in the steps of Jesus. (John 15:10, 1Pet. 2:21, Matt. 16:24-27, Psa. 119:1-3, Job 8:20-22, Prov. 10:29-32)

We remain under the gentle, guiding power of the Holy Spirit ("led" by Him - Rom. 8:13-14, Psa. 19:12-14, 139:23-24, 1Kings 19:11-13), so long as we don't grieve and quench Him. (Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) We need to keep our hearts soft toward Him so that we can hear and heed Him, NOT harden our hearts by indulging in sinful thoughts and behaviors—because doing so shuts out the influence of the Holy Spirit on our lives. Eventually, we may no longer even hear Him—but faith comes from hearing the word. (Rom. 10:17, Matt. 11:15, 13:9, 13:14-17, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 4:21-25, 8:18, Luke 8:8, 14:34-35, Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, Rev. 3:6, 13, 22, 1John 4:5-6, John 15:20) So deliberate sin endangers our faith. (Heb. 3:12-14, 1Pet. 2:11-12) How can we call upon His name for salvation if we no longer even believe He exists, let alone that Jesus is the ONLY way? (Heb. 1:1-4, 11:6, 1John 5:11-12, Rom. 1:18-21) Jesus also taught this in the Parable of the Sower—not everyone holds fast to the end. (Mark 4:14-20) Thus the repeated exhortations to hold fast. (Luke 8:15, Rom. 11:22-23, 12:9, 1Cor. 15:1-2, Col. 1:23, 2Tim. 3:14, Phil. 2:16, 1Thess. 5:19-22, Heb. 3:5-6, 4:14, 6:18, 10:23, John 15:1-21, 1Pet. 2:11-12, Jam. 5:11, Prov. 11:19-21, Rev. 2:13, 25, 3:11)

*For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But **what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death**. But now that you have been **set free from sin** and have become **slaves of God**, the **fruit** you get leads to **sanctification and its end, eternal life**. For the wages of sin is*

death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:20-23

If we're going to throw out everything in the Bible that we dislike hearing, then our faith is based on a lie and cannot save us. We are warned that if we choose to indulge our old sinful flesh instead of the new creation, we CAN trade in our firstborn inheritance for "a bowl of soup" like Esau did. (Heb. 12:15-17) So what do we do if we struggle against sin (Heb. 12:3-14), but we DO want to receive the inheritance we hope for? (Heb. 6:11-12, 12:7, 13:7-8) We exercise self-control and avoid temptation. (Mark 14:38, 1Cor. 9:24-10:13, 3John 1:11) We choose our company wisely. (1Cor. 15:33-34, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, Jam. 4:4-10, 1John 4:5-6, John 15:18-21, 1John 2:15-17) We remain humble and put all of our trust in God to help us in our walk—helping others to do so as well. (Jam. 4:7-10, 4-6, 5:19-20, 2Tim. 2:24-3:5, Heb. 10:24-27, 1Pet. 5:6-11, Eph. 3:20-21, 4:1-3, 6:10-20, 1John 1:6-2:6, Col. 1:9-12, Gal. 6:1, Jude 1:22-25)

Ask any believer who doesn't make a regular practice of sin how they manage it. First, they'll (hopefully) admit they're not perfect, since only Jesus ever remained sinless. (2Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15) Then, they're sure to say that they don't put themselves in situations, if at all possible, where sin will be a likely outcome. If they have no way of avoiding temptation, they constantly keep in mind what it cost Jesus to wash away their sins. (Isa. 52:13-53:12, 2Cor. 4:10, 1Pet. 2:24) They remember that what is future is glorious and eternal (1Cor. 2:9, 9:24-27, 2Tim. 2:4-5, Jam. 1:12, Heb. 10:34-36, John 14:1-3, Phil. 3:20-21, Col. 1:13-28, Col. 3, 1Pet. 1:3-9, 2Pet. 1:10-11), and that these earthly bodies are mere tents, but our citizenship is in heaven. (2Cor. 5:1-10, Phil. 4:8, 2Pet. 1:14)

"Overcomers" do so through the power of Jesus Christ IN them. HE overcame the world, and gives US the power to do the same. (John 16:33, Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21, 21:7) We must pray and read our Bibles for ourselves to stay firmly grounded in Christ, abiding in Him. (John 15:1-21, Col. 2:6-7—we're not to revert to trying to find assurance of salvation by keeping the law with its ordinances - Eph. 2:15, NOR are we to "mock" God by "sowing to the flesh" - Gal. 6:7-8) We MUST heed the prompting of the Holy Spirit when He convicts us in our hearts of sin. (John 14:26, 16:13-15, Eph. 4:20-24, 1Thess. 5:19) We should always keep in mind that we will answer to Jesus for how we used our freedom from the law. (1Pet. 2:16, 4:4-5, 4:17-18, Gal. 5:13, Jam. 1:25, 2:12, Heb. 4:12-13, 10:30-31, Rom. 2:6-11, Rev. 22:12, Acts 10:42, 2Tim. 4:1-5)

Jesus DOES love you as you are—enough to die for you while you long before you ever knew anything about Him. (Rom. 5:6-8, 1John 4:9-10) But He ALSO

loves you enough to change you from the INSIDE out. (Rom. 8:29, 1Pet. 1:14-19) Sin is the result of the decayed world—it's NOT the fruit of the new creation that He makes us. (2Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:14-15, Rom. 6:4, 20-23, 7:4-6, Col. 1:10)

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2*

*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*

If anyone cannot accept the fact that God does NOT want believers to wallow in sin, then that's sad. (2Pet. 2:22) However, silencing the message so that others (who might be willing to accept the truth) won't ever hear it is EVIL. That's the work of Satan. (2Cor. 11:13-15, Rom. 1:18, Titus 1:16, Matt. 12:30) Notice below that walking in LOVE and refraining from sexual immorality go together.

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But **sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints**. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that **everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God**. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore **do not become partners with them**; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and **try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord**. **Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them**. For it is **shameful** even to speak of the things that they do in **secret**. But when*

anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." **Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.** Ephesians 5:1-17

But as for the Gentiles who have **believed**, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should **abstain** from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and **from sexual immorality.**" Acts 21:25

Let's take Peter's advice and not pay any attention to those who twist Paul's words such that they contradict the rest of Scripture.

*But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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 3:7-18*

Let's listen to John's wise words of counsel:

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and **not shrink from him in shame at his coming**. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who **practices righteousness has been born of him**. 1 John 2:28-29 (Also see the passage that immediately follows in 1John 3:1-10.)

Let's take to heart these things that Paul said to us IN LOVE:

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that **God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance**? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be **tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil**, the Jew first and also the Greek, but **glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good**, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. Romans 2:4-11 (Also see 2Thess. 2:9-12.)

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

And let's not forget that it was Jesus Himself who sent His angel to give us these admonitions:

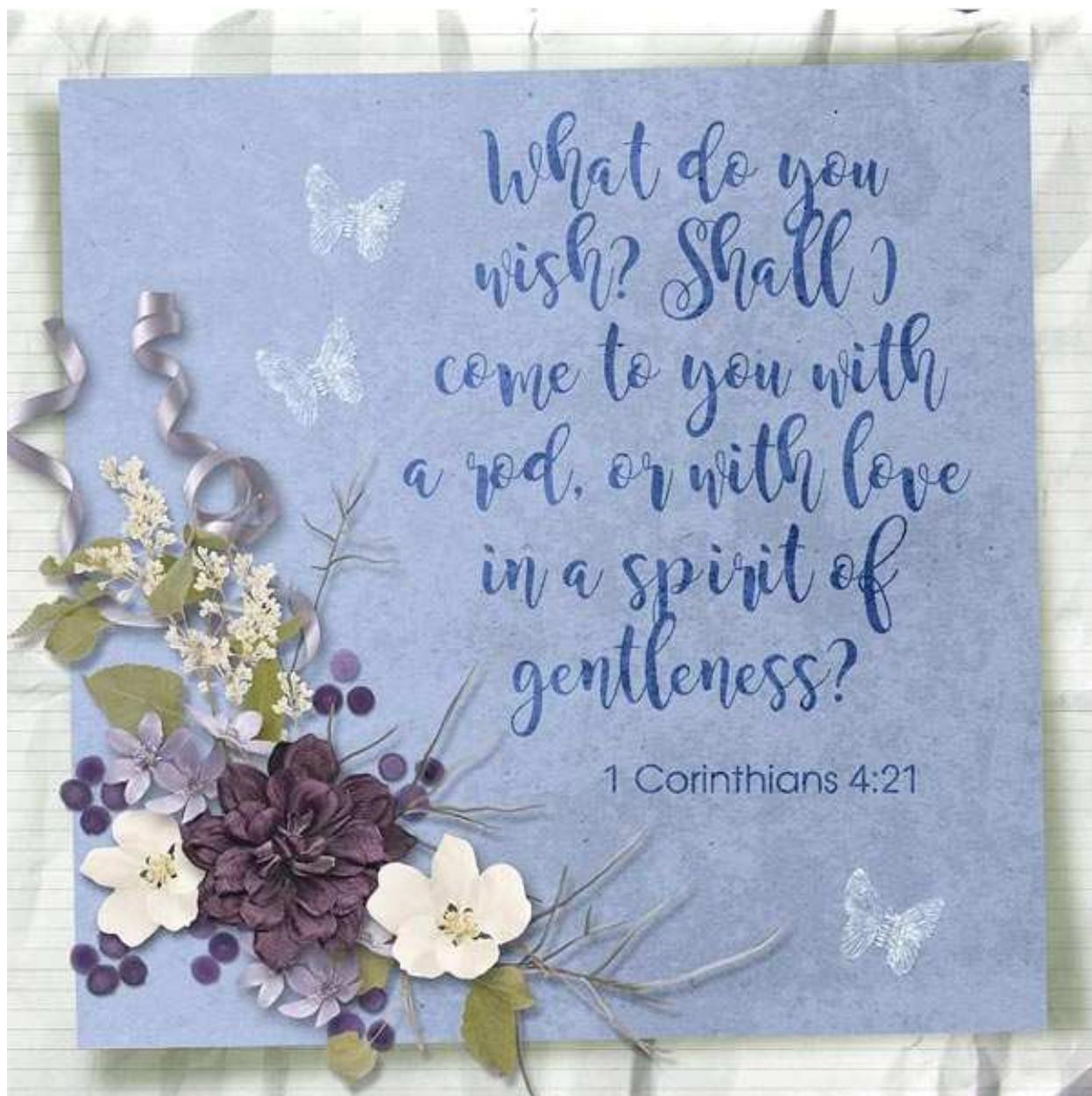
"Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. **Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.** "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without

price. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Revelation 22:11-21 (Also see Matt. 16:24-27.)

Let's not be deceived. (1Cor. 6:9-10, 15:33-34, Gal. 6:7-8, Jam. 1:13-16, 1Cor. 3:16-18, 1John 2:26-28, 3:7-10, Eph. 5:5-17, 3-4, 2Cor. 11:3-4—there is a "different Jesus" who demands keeping the ordinances and rituals of the law, AND there is a "different Jesus" who grants a license to sin—BOTH are false - Gal. 5:3-4, Eph. 4:20-24, 17-19, 5:15-17.) Let's not listen to people who say that only a tiny portion of the Bible applies to the Church (and they can't even agree on WHICH part, since it all goes together—so they take verses out of context and twist them to fit their preferred view.) (Prov. 28:10) We DO get our definitions of right and wrong from the SAME place we originally were told to love our neighbor (Lev. 19:18), even though many requirements of the Old Testament were foreshadows finding their fulfillment in Christ. (Lev. 18-19, Col. 2:17, Rom. 14:14, 17, 20, Mark 7:18-23, Heb. 9:23-24) Repentance (first from unbelief, then from ungodly living, with God's help) precedes forgiveness. (Luke 15:7, 10, 10:13, 11:32, 3:8, 5:32; also see John 5:14, 8:11—go and sin no more.) Those who refuse to do so will not enter the kingdom. (Matt. 13:41-43, 47-50, Luke 17:1-4) Let's be READY. (Matt. 25:10-13, Psa. 119:105, 111:10, Eph. 4:14-5:33)

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while **evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to **make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training in righteousness**, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** 2 Timothy 3:12-17

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