

## Set Free

written by Tricia Berg

When I felt this message beginning in my heart a few days ago and began to write it down, I didn't have an idea yet what I would call it or when I would finish it, but God did. So here we are celebrating Independence Day in the United States once again and here is my devotional about freedom. People love to quote this verse to show how free believers are:

*But now we have been **released from the Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we **serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter**. Romans 7:6*

It is TRUE—we are NOT under the OLD law. What, you say? We're not under ANY law—we're FREE!

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "**If you abide** in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin**. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:31-36*

### FREE FROM SIN

We ARE free from the burden of trying (and failing) to obey the letter of the law AND from the enslavement that sin once had over us, from how it used to control us when we continually broke both the letter as well as the spirit of the law. However, now we're under the NEW "law" (keep reading; see Rom. 8:2, Jam. 1:25, 2:8, 2:12) IF we are believers. We obey the SPIRIT of the law, which we were unable to do prior to being indwelt by His Spirit. This is why we need to ABIDE. (There is no such thing as abiding in something or Someone you were never IN to begin with—this applies to believers.) It's not a "once and done" kind of thing at all. If we're really free from that awful control that our old sinful flesh once had over us, then we should not have such a strong desire to continue sinning that we are unable to resist it. (Philip. 2:12-13, 1Cor. 10:13) Paul clarified previously that grace is NOT a license to sin:

*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. 24 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 5:13-18, 24-26

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! **How can we who died to sin still live in it?** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life.** Romans 6:1-4

#### SLAVES TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

So you also must **consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? **Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!** Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, **you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?** Romans 6:11-16

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

Yikes! Jesus said above in John 8 that if we are slaves to sin, then we cannot remain in the house forever. And look what else the Bible says about the God's house:

Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but **Christ is faithful over God's house as a son**. And **we are his house if indeed we hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in our hope. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be **hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**. For we have come to share in Christ, **if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end**. Hebrews 3:5-6, 13-14

## HOW TO INHERIT

This next passage is not referring to merely believing. We have an amazing inheritance and are FOOLS if we trade it in for temporary earthly pleasures like Esau did when he sold his birthright of the firstborn son to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of soup! Unbelievers cannot "become defiled," as they have not yet been cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness without which no one will see the Lord**. See to it that no one **fails to obtain the grace of God**; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; **that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal**. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:14-17*

Our inheritance is FAR more valuable than ANYTHING this world has to offer. We would be incredibly unwise to jeopardize it by failing to recognize that and treating it as common just because it was FREE. Unbelievers cannot "insult the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified," because they are NOT sanctified.

**Let us hold fast** the confession of our hope **without wavering**, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. **For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES**. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has **regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of**

**grace?** For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "**THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.**" It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, **knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.** **Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.** FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. **But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.** Hebrews 10:23-39

Now, little children, **abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.** If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who **practices righteousness** is born of Him. 1 John 2:28-29

#### CHILDREN OF GOD

Are we receiving a conflicting message? Isn't salvation free? Yes, it is, but the benefit is eternal life, not freedom to continue sinning in this life as though we have never received it, and certainly not celebrating sin with PRIDE like unbelievers who are perishing do. When God adopts us into His family, He expects us to behave as His children, not as though we belong to the devil. (1John 3, 1Pet. 3:13-15, 1Pet. 4, Eph. 4:17-32, Rom. 8:23, Gal. 4:6)

*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.** Ephesians 2:8-10*

If God "doesn't mind" sin anymore, then why would Jesus have to die for ours to redeem us? God doesn't change! He STILL hates sin, but because of His great love for His creation, He made a way for us to be set free from it, at GREAT cost to Himself. There is a difference between not being condemned to eternal punishment, and there being no consequences in this life or the next for

disregarding God's will for us. (And no, the punishment is not "purgatory," which does NOT exist according to the Bible, our ONLY authority. It is loss of eternal rewards for true believers, and finding out that God cannot be fooled for those who behave like unsaved people because that's what they are, despite their false claims to the contrary.) (Col. 3:23-25, 1Cor. 3:14-15, Rev. 11:18, Rev. 21:7-8, Rev. 22:12)

Let's look at the context prior to the verse at the top of this article:

*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may **belong to another**, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may **bear fruit for God**. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to **bear fruit for death**. Romans 7:4-5*

## ABIDING & BEARING FRUIT

What is this talk about "belonging to another" and "bearing fruit"? Haven't we been set FREE? (See John 15 about bearing fruit.) Haven't we done God the most wonderful favor ever to say we believe in Jesus? Hmm—do you normally think that you've done someone a favor when you accept a gift? Let's see what Paul continues on to say:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For **the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death**. Romans 8:1-2*

Refer back to John 15 to see what it means to abide IN Jesus such that there is "no condemnation." Branches that bear no fruit, or bad fruit, are cut off just as we are to "cut off" any part of OUR body that causes us to sin ("bears bad fruit"). We are the body of Christ, and He does not expect His members ("body parts") to purposely sin or cause sin. (Matt. 18:5-9) He made it clear that He abides in His Father's love by obeying and that is how WE are to abide in HIM. (John 15:10) It does NOT glorify the Father if Jesus' disciples, His body, do not obey Him! (John 15:8) On the one hand, this seems shocking compared to what we are being told by so many these days, but on the other hand, why should we be surprised? We have heard John 15 quoted so often before—why did we so readily accept that Jesus didn't mean exactly what He said?

And how could we possibly claim to love Him if we can't even (don't want to?) give up worthless pleasures in this world in order to obey and serve Him who died for us? The one who loves Him does not trample on His grace, but yields

to His Holy Spirit within them, who empowers them to obey (and they confess and repent of their sins when they slip). (Ex. 20:6, Deu. 5:10, 7:9, Neh. 1:5, Psa. 25:10, 33:18, 36:10, 40:16, Psa. 69:35-36, 70:4, Psa. 103:11-17, 118:4, 119:32, 165, Psa. 147:11, Dan. 9:4, Rom. 8:28, 1Cor. 2:9-10, Eph. 6:24, 2Thess. 2:9-12, 2Tim. 2:22, Jam. 1:12, 2:5) "Fear" of the Lord is to respect Him enough to do as He says, knowing He sees ALL. (Psa. 111:10, Luke 6:46, Zeph. 1:12, Mal. 3:13-4:1, Psa. 94:9)

Paul warned us that our branches can be broken off just as some of Israel's branches were broken off in order to graft us in. He said not to be proud. God will have mercy on whomever He will and we are not to question Him, but remain in humble obedience, trusting in His perfect nature that ALL that He does is just and good. (Rom. 11, Rom. 9:14-16, 20, Matt. 23:11-12, Jam. 4:4-10, 2Pet. 3:5-10) Interestingly, I have yet to hear someone who says that the Church "is" Israel refer to themselves as a Jew. (Rom. 2:29)

## REWARDS

Jesus told several parables comparing Himself to a master who goes on a trip far away, is possibly delayed returning, and then comes back to "settle accounts" with His servants—to reward those who have served well and to punish those who have not. He told us that the one who does well is blessed and to be READY for His return, even though we don't know when that will be. (Matt. 24:42-51, Matt. 25:14-32, Matt. 25:31-46, Mark 13:32-27, Luke 12:35-48, Luke 19:11-27, Matt. 25:1-13) Notice that He is not pleased with the unfaithful servants and they receive severe punishment. If Jesus is our LORD, then we should be obeying Him out of LOVE, with our WHOLE hearts, because of what He did to set us free from the wages we had earned due to sin, which is eternal destruction on the Lake of Fire. (Rev. 20:11-15)

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

Some say that the parables were not for us to heed—that we only need to pay attention to the parts of the Bible from Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit arrived) forward or even from the beginning of Paul's ministry (when the gospel was taken to the Gentiles). Please see further below for more on that, but we can learn much about God and His ways from the parables even though SOME of them were specifically directed to the Jews, or more specifically to the Pharisees and scribes. (Matt. 21:45, 2Tim. 3:13-17) Jesus is the Good Shepherd of ONE flock. (John 10:14-16) He is making Jew and Gentile into ONE new man in this

age. (Eph. 2:11-22) I say "in this age" because there is a time when the full number of Gentiles will have "come in," ending the age of grace for Gentiles and resuming God's dealings with Israel. (Rom. 11:25) I think the other "mystery" of this age, which is believers being indwelt by the Holy Spirit (not only having the Spirit "upon" a select few as in the Old Testament times), may also end at that time. (Rom. 16:25-27, Eph. 1:7-10, Eph. 3:4-11, 5:32, Col. 1:27, 1Pet. 1:10-12, Rev. 10:5-7)

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has **blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.** Ephesians 1:3-14*

## IN CHRIST THE LORD

Believers obeying their LORD (and what else do you think it means that He has REDEEMED us and purchased us with His blood? Acts 20:28, Rev. 5:9, Rom. 3:25, 5:9, Gal. 3:13-14, 1Pet. 1:18-19) is NOT working *for* salvation, because it only applies to those who are ALREADY saved. (Everyone will acknowledge Jesus is Lord eventually, but only during this lifetime will it result in salvation.) No one can become a member of the Body of Christ through their own efforts—it is a free gift of God by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We don't "keep ourselves" saved through works—we show that we ARE saved by our works. No one who has TRULY received that gift, which is to be born again by His Spirit (Rom. 8:9), will continue to deliberately PRACTICE sin. There is a difference between slipping and living IN our sins instead of abiding in Christ. (Col. 1:9-12. 1Thess. 4:1-2, 2Tim. 2:3-7)

Studying John 14 reveals that being IN Jesus is not a matter of reciting some words after someone. The one who loves Him is the one who obeys and that is the one His Father loves and He and His Father come to dwell with (in). John 16 and 17 are also very helpful when trying to understand this mystery. (Col. 1:24-29) Jesus overcame by being obedient and faithful unto death and that is what we are called to do. (John 10:17-18, John 4:34, 8:29, 9:4, Romans 12:9-21, Eph. 5:15-21, Heb. 3:6, 4:14, 6:7-9, 10:23, Rev. 2-3) The confidence and hope we hold fast is that God has accepted us in Christ, provided that we abide in Him to the end. (Col. 1:27-29)

The assurances that nothing can take us out of his hand or separate us from His love all refer to external forces, not our own willful rebellion against Him. (Romans 8:35-39) If it's impossible for us to go our own way and do our own thing, then why are we told that we are worse off if we receive Christ and then forsake Him than if we had never known the truth? (2Pet. 2:18-22) Does God force us to believe in Him or obey Him? If He wanted to do that, He could have created robots, couldn't he? –but He didn't. Thankfully, He is rich in mercy and love, wanting all to be saved. He will not cast out those who come to Him for forgiveness and cleansing. (2Pet. 3:9, 1Tim. 2:1-6, John 6:37, 1John 1:9)

*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."*  
*John 10:27-30*

## THE LETTER OF THE LAW

Now would be a good time to caution those who want to go back to obeying the letter of the law. (Gal. 5:4, Acts 13:39-40, 15:9-10. Rom. 8:3-4) Jesus fulfilled the letter of the law for us. (Matt. 5:17) He IS our Sabbath rest. Whoever stumbles on the "Rock of offense," which is Jesus, will not enter into that rest. (Rom. 3:7-19) The context of the passage below is not about observing the Sabbath ritually, but of accepting Jesus' work, which He finished, rather than approaching salvation as though it could be obtained by works. (Rom. 9:30-33) The Sabbath was meant to point to the rest that Jesus would accomplish for those who believe, giving relief from the "work" of observing ritual laws in order to be in right standing before God. Jesus is our righteousness. The law shows us that we could never keep it all perfectly—only He could and He did. (Rom. 3:20, Col. 2:13-15) We now belong to Him, having been redeemed by His precious blood, and live to please HIM. (Gal. 1:10) This is not to say that we don't still need physical rest. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not

man for the Sabbath. He is LORD of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27-28) We are meant to honor Him ALL of the time, not only one day a week. He is our very life and the heart of ALL we do. (Col. 3)

*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have **failed to reach it**. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united **by faith** with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this passage he said, "**They shall not enter my rest.**" Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and **those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience**, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.**" **For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for **whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his**. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 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. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** Hebrews 4:1-16*

God rested after His work of creation AND after His work of salvation. In the above passage, reference is made to the Israelites refusing to enter the promised land (which was a foreshadow of salvation). Their disobedience in this instance was NOT failing to observe the Sabbath, but refusing to enter the promised land (which we do now by receiving Christ as Savior). A warning is included for those who may claim to believe, apparently not realizing that God cannot be fooled. This applies both to relying partially on our own works and outraging the Spirit of grace by willful disobedience to the Lord. The path is NARROW.

If the point of the passage was that we need to do the works of observing the weekly Sabbath in order to remain saved, then Paul would not have said:

*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of **food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.** Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not **holding fast to the Head [Jesus]**, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. Colossians 2:16-19*

***One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Romans 14:5-8***

#### OLD TESTAMENT FORESHADOWS

Both Jew and Gentile can now be saved, so symbols of separation such as food restrictions are no longer required. (Col. 2:17) However, this does not nullify every single instruction of the Old Testament. For example, meat offered to idols has no power over us, but if by eating it we will give credence to the concept or cast a stumbling block before a brother in the Lord, we mustn't eat it. (1Cor. 10:23-31) The apostles held a meeting and drafted a letter outlining the requirements for Gentile believers. Some behaviors are still not acceptable for believers—most especially sexual immorality (which includes all physical relationships of intimacy between anyone OTHER THAN one man and one woman who are MARRIED). (Rom. 13:11-14, 1Cor. 5, 1Cor. 6:12-20, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2, Eph. 5:3-12, Col. 3:5-10, 1Thess. 4:3-8, Rom. 1:32)

*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 **practicing** such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God.** Galatians 5:19-21*

This is serious business! Those who **practice** these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. These kinds of behaviors are to be put behind us if we are truly born again. The list covers MANY undesirable traits that are NOT fruits of the Spirit. We lie if we say we have asked for forgiveness of sins that we have not repented of, but are deliberately continuing in—that is how we soil the white garment provided to us by Jesus. It is not cleansed in His blood while we are still walking in darkness, and if we claim to be enlightened, then we won't try to get away with sinning. (1John 1:5-10, Gal. 6:7-8, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Heb. 6:4-9, Heb. 10:32-39, Rev. 3:4-5) The ONLY way to overcome our old evil ways is by the power of His Spirit.

*"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.**" Revelation 3:15-19*

#### IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

God isn't interested in lip service. Even if someone attends worship services each week, that does them no good whatsoever if they live like the rest of the world all week long. (Jam. 1:22, Jam. 4:4, 1John 2:15-17) "Purchasing gold refined by fire" from Jesus is like selling all we have to buy the pearl of great price. (Matt. 13:44-46) Salvation is a free gift, but the kingdom costs your life. No one is worthy of it if they value ANYTHING or ANYONE more than Jesus. (Matt. 10:37-39, Matt. 19:27-29, Mark 10:28-30, Luke 18:28-30, Matt. 10:37-42, Luke 14:33) "Fire" speaks of purification and refinement through suffering. (Isa. 48:10, 1Pet. 1:6-7) "Buying white garments to clothe our nakedness" is washing our SOILED garments in Jesus' blood, without intentionally staining them with the wicked ways of the world again afterwards. (Jam. 1:27, 2Pet. 2:22) "Buying salve for our eyes to see" is purifying the lamp of the body:

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of***

**darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!** No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Matthew 6:19-24

We are NOT to defile our bodies, which are temples of the Lord, by viewing with delight and participating in the "deeds of darkness." (John 3:19, Rom. 13:12, Eph. 5:11-12, 1Thess. 5:5-8) We ALL need to get dressed and keep our robes clean (through obedience and repentance when we sin)! (Rev. 3:17-19, Rev. 16:15) Jesus is not our "buddy" that we can trifle with—He is our LORD. He will be judging His own FIRST. (Heb. 10:30, 1Cor. 4:4-5, 2Cor. 5:16-17) There is NOTHING hidden from His sight. (Psalm 90:8, Heb. 4:12-13) He disciplines us during this life so that we can avoid losing eternal rewards. If we reject His discipline, we have only ourselves to blame. Not only have we hurt ourselves, but we have robbed Him of the glory and honor our obedience would have brought Him, and of the joy of rewarding us for it. (Dan. 12:3, 2Cor. 3:18, and verses referred to previously in the section entitled "Rewards.")

**But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.** 1 Corinthians 11:31-32

**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.** Hebrews 12:3-8

For it is time for **judgment to begin at the household of God;** and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And **"If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"** 1 Peter 4:17-18

SIN

People are fond of saying that all sin is the same, but it's not quite true. The sin of sexual immorality (of ALL kinds) has been singled out as being worse because it is a sin against God's temple. He resides in the bodies of those who are born again and are one Spirit with Him—the two becoming one flesh physically in marriage is symbolic of our becoming one spirit with the Lord. (1Cor. 6:12-20) In 1Sam. 18:1, the relationship referred to between David and Jonathan is SPIRITUAL not physical, just as it says—just as Jesus has with believers. (1Cor. 6:17)

God did not condone homosexuality EVER. In the Old Testament, the rules about sexual behavior included a great many examples that we all find repulsive, just as we all once did with the act of homosexuality. (Lev. 20:10-21) It is possible to become accustomed to sin and sear our consciences so that we can no longer rely on them to guide us morally. (1Tim. 4:1-2) Making something legal doesn't make it right. (e.g. abortion) How many more acts that God hates will be declared acceptable? How about the rejection of God's design of gender altogether that is now happening? This is rebellion against God and so we can expect it to just keep going. This battle has been waged by Satan, who is well aware of how to offend God. Even he knows that God doesn't CHANGE—what God said He hated in the past, He STILL hates. The idea that ANY illicit relationships are now acceptable is a lie. (Rom. 1, 1Cor. 5) We have been warned not to listen to false teachers who say that God will not judge people for sensual sins (Rom. 1, 2Pet. 2, Jude 1) That said, we must remember that in the New Testament, we are to love even our enemies. Needless to say, this does not include violence towards or killing anyone, name calling or hating—but speaking the truth in love is NOT hate, and "love" has not been redefined as "anything goes" either.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the **knowledge of the Son of God**, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may **no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes**. 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**. Ephesians 4:11-24

## DEFILEMENTS

Is it any wonder that these very sins are so prevalent today, knowing who is behind them? This is the same lure that Satan used in the Garden with Eve. "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3) Eve fell for the devil's bait (in her case, that she would be more like God if she ate the forbidden fruit), Adam listened to Eve instead of following GOD'S instructions, and look what happened—untold suffering throughout all ages—paradise lost! If we want to be part of the NEW creation, we must control ourselves. (Rev. 21:5-8, 1Thess. 4:2-8, Eph. 5:3) If there is attraction that is not acceptable to God, then we must not act on it or even entertain it in our thoughts. (Matt. 5:27-32, Matt. 19:3-12) There is a difference between "loving" someone and having intimate physical relations with them. Only the relations that God approves of are acceptable for believers. (Gal. 6:1, Jam. 1:13-15)

*And Jesus said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (**Thus he declared all foods clean.**) And he said, "**What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**" Mark 7:18-23*

*I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that **nothing [no food] is unclean in itself**; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. **For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.** Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for **the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.*

**Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.** The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For **whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.** Romans 14:14-23

You can see the symbolism here of the unclean animals representing separation from Gentiles, because God uses this example to show Peter that the Gentiles can now receive salvation:

*The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "**By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.**" And the voice came to him again a second time, "**What God has made clean, do not call common.**" This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, "**You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So***

**when I was sent for, I came without objection.** I ask then why you sent for me." And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." So Peter opened his mouth and said: "**Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),** you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." **While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"** And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Acts 10:9-48

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have

*risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. **For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.** Farewell."* Acts 15:22-29 (Also Acts 21:25)

## ALL SCRIPTURE

Speaking of people, who were not sent, presenting messages that unsettle minds and distort the teachings of the Bible, some teach that we can choose which parts of New Testament apply to believers. (This goes beyond trying to determine who the audience was whether in person when Jesus spoke, or of a letter sent by the apostles.) Is Christ divided? (2Tim. 3:16-17)

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** 1 Corinthians 1:10-13*

*But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and **the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.** Acts 20:24*

*For I would have you know, brothers, that **the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.** Galatians 1:11-12*

Let me tell you this for SURE. Paul would NOT approve of ANYONE dividing up the New Testament and saying they only need to pay heed to what he wrote (nor would he want any buildings named after him, but that's another story). Paul got His information from Jesus, who does not contradict Himself. The difference in "his gospel" is that Paul was appointed apostle to the Gentiles, who had not previously been included in the plan of salvation, until the time appointed by God. (Col. 1:18-29, Gal. 4:3-8, Rom. 10:16-21, Rom. 11:11) There is not a different gospel for one group than another, just focus on different groups of people by different apostles as God appointed. (2Cor. 11:1-

4) Paul was also the first to be given understanding about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ.

Two of the great "mysteries" of this age are Gentile believers being grafted in to Israel, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is what Jesus talked about in John 3, 14-17. He seals us as belonging to God, and He guides, teaches and fills us with His power to overcome this world. (John 14:15-17, 20, John 16:33, John 17:20-23) Paul was specially chosen and appointed to bring the message of salvation to the Gentiles. (Rom. 11:13-15, Gal. 2:7-8, 1Tim. 2:7, 2Tim. 1:11) If we are meant to disregard the gospels, then why did Paul teach us to observe the Lord's Supper, which was instituted prior to the his ministry? We partake of the bread representing Jesus' body because we ARE His body, redeemed by His blood, which is the cup of the New Covenant. (Luke 22:20, 1Cor. 10:16, 1Cor. 11:25, Eph. 5:23) We drink of the cup of the covenant that we have entered into by grace through faith—the same one in the gospels.

*And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but **with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.** Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a **new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.** 2 Corinthians 3:3-6*

Jesus gave instructions to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey His commandments (in that order). Paul said that was not the focus of his ministry, even though he was baptized himself (Acts 9:18) and he did baptize some believers. (1Cor. 1:12-17) He wasn't "anti-baptism," he just didn't want anyone calling themselves HIS followers. We are not followers of anyone except Jesus. He is the SOLE mediator of the New Covenant. (Matt. 23:8-10, 1Tim. 2:5-6, Heb. 9:15, 12:22-24)

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20*

## THE KINGDOM

Even though the kingdom has been prepared since before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34), Jesus will not return to raise the physical bodies of its

inhabitants (those who died in Christ and those belonging to Him who are alive at the time of His return - 1Thess. 4:16-18, John 14:2-3) until the last member has been added to His Body. (1Cor. 12:27) The kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to people who would produce its fruit (Matt. 21:42-43), which is those Jews and Gentiles who would believe in this age, the Church. (If "Church" and "Israel" are the same, then the idea of the kingdom being taken from one and given to another is confusing, to say the least. It also makes no sense if we say "they" are blinded until a certain point and "you" received mercy and so "they" will receive mercy as well if both entities are identical. Rom. 11) This does not mean that God is finished with Israel as a people. After the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, then those Jews who have been temporarily hardened of heart/blinded of sight/deafened of hearing will realize Jesus is Messiah. (Rom. 11, Zech. 12:10, Rev. 1:7) See how Joseph (another foreshadow of Jesus) forgave his brothers (who did not recognize him until a certain point) for rejecting him. (Gen. 42:8, 45:4-8) Also remember in the story of Ruth (her redemption and grafting in to Israel is a picture of salvation - 1Cor. 6:20), she is redeemed AND her mother-in-law Naomi's land is redeemed by Boaz as well. (Ruth 4:9-10, Isa. 62:1-5, 11-12)

What kind of kingdom is this that we have been given and what is expected of those who are part of it? It's interesting that we find the answer to the first question at the beginning of Revelation, just before Jesus gives the answer to the second question in detail. (ALL of us should read Rev. 2-3.)

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to **his servants** the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to **his servants** the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who **bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ**, even to all that he saw. **Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from **Jesus Christ** the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the **ruler of kings on earth**. To him who loves us and has **freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father**, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." I, John, your brother and **partner in the***

**tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus**, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Revelation-1:9

And again:

*And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and **by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.**"* Revelation 5:8-10

*But you are a chosen race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who **called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to **abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*** 1 Peter 2:9-12

## THE PRIESTHOOD

The Old Testament priests could not serve in the temple without first observing certain rituals, including being purified and being clothed according to God's specifications. (Ex. 29) We are purified through the water of the word (John 15:3, Eph. 5:25-27) and clothed in the garment of salvation and robe of righteousness given to us by Jesus. (Isa. 61:10, Rev. 3:5, 18, Rev. 6:11, 19:7-8, 22:14)

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, **clothed in white robes**, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "**Salvation** belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and

might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "**Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?**" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** Revelation 7:9-17

God STILL requires that His temple be HOLY. However, the temple in this age is OUR BODIES. The Old Testament priests could be defiled by touching many unclean things. We are defiled by what comes out of our hearts and acting upon those unholy impulses according to the flesh instead of walking in the Spirit (Matt. 15:18-20, Mark 7:21-23, Gal. 5:16, 25, Rom. 8:5, 13); the ONLY way for us to be cleansed is by the blood of Jesus. (1John 1:7, Eph. 1:7-10, Col. 1:14, 20, Rev. 1:5) He also washes us with the water of the Word (remember He IS the Word - John 1:1-3, Rev. 19:11-13). If we will let His WORDS abide in us (and that involves DOING as He says, not only HEARING them), the very same words that cleansed us, we will remain IN Him, and we will remain CLEAN (John 15:7, but also see all of John 15).

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. **Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.** You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? **So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.** A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain

*fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And **everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.***” Matthew 7:12-27

## JUDGMENT OF WORKS

Jesus is our Lord and we are to do as He says, which includes loving one another and giving to the poor, thus storing treasure in heaven. He said that those who are rewarded when He judges the nations will have been kind and compassionate, faithful and true like Him. (Matt. 25:31-46, Matt. 5:1-16, Luke 6:20-23) Was His point that we will earn salvation that way? NO! Does it please our Lord and Master when we place the work of His kingdom higher in our priorities than anything else, not caring for this world or ourselves as much as His glory and pleasing Him? YES! He DOES want us to serve Him in this life. Why would we think that He expects nothing of us until He creates the NEW heavens and earth? He certainly NEVER gave us that impression! Our heart is where our treasure is, and that treasure is Jesus! (Matt. 6:21) He is the pearl of great price for those who love Him.

*"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? **Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.** But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, **the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know** and will cut him in pieces and **put him with the hypocrites.** In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Matthew 24:45-51

The "talents" in the next parable include everything God has given us to invest in the growth of His kingdom (not only money, Luke 11:13, 1Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31, 1Pet. 4:10-11, Rom. 12:4-8).

*"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his*

master's money. **Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'** His master said to him, **'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne." Matthew 25:14-31

So we are to use our **freedom** to serve God in the way that He specified. It doesn't take much sense to realize that if we tell people what they want to hear and go along with the flow, they will like us, but if that's what we're to do, then why were we told we would be hated and persecuted? (John 15:18-21 1John 3:11-13, 2Tim. 3:12, 1Pet. 4:3-5, Luke 6:22-23, Matt. 5:10-12, 1John 2:15-17) James goes on to say that faith without works is just as dead as works without faith. Faith precedes works and after that, they go hand in hand.

*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? **If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for*

*all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:5-13*

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? **Can that faith save him?** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that **faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.** James 2:14-26*

## LAW OF LIBERTY

So if we look at the Scriptures, we can see that believers in this age are under the "perfect law of liberty." God has not made ANY robots. He gave us free will and with that gift, we choose for ourselves whether we love Him or not. If we love Him, we'll obey. If not, we won't. It's VERY simple. (John 14:23-24) Robots do not worship. Robots could never be in the image of God, who is Spirit. (Heb. 12:28-29, Gen. 1:27) Humans have spirits, not robots.

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.** If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God,*

*the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:22-27*

*And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "**Which commandment is the most important of all?**" Jesus answered, "**The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** The second is this: '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." **And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."** And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:28-34*

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship **in spirit and truth.**" John 4:23-24*

BE READY

I can't make anyone care about this any more than I can force anyone to believe. All I can do is encourage my brothers and sisters in the Lord to examine the Scriptures for themselves to be sure that they are ready when He returns. (The time is very urgent, since none of us know when He will return OR when our own personal appointment with Him will be.) We each have to answer for ourselves. In this country and in these times, we have no excuse for accepting lies from anyone as though we were unable to verify the teachings for ourselves. Paul speaks these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This message is BOTH historical and a warning to us:

*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.** 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 12:20-13:5

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.** Acts 17:11

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, **serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials** that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I **did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house**, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 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.'" And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship. Acts 20:17-38*

## THE TRUTH SAVES

The point of being honest is to encourage faithfulness and maturity in Christ. (Philip. 3:14-19, Col. 1:28, 2Pet. 1:3-12) If "encouragement" and "love" do not have truth, then they don't benefit people at all, but lead them astray instead. (Matt. 15:12-14, 16:26) We shouldn't be afraid to speak boldly about Jesus, since our goal is to spare people future shame and punishment. How can we live with ourselves knowing that people are on the broad path to destruction while we remain silent? (Ezek. 3:17-21) The context of the "narrow gate" was warnings about false prophets and against being only hearers of the word and not doers. (Matt. 7:13-14)

*This is why I write these things when I am absent, **that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.** Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! **Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.** And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:10-11*

*Summoning the crowd along with his disciples, He said to them, "If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must **deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. **For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life? What can a man give in exchange for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."** Mark 8:34-38*

*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.** If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. John 12:25-26*

We can know the signs of the times of Jesus' return, but otherwise, things will appear to be continuing on as always. (Matt. 24)

*But understand this, that **in the last days** there will come times of difficulty. For **people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.** For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and **led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.** Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also **oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.** But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. 2 Timothy 3:1-9*

*"But **concerning that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For **as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.** Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. **Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**" Matthew 24:36-44*

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that **scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."** For they deliberately overlook this fact, that **the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 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 3:1-18***

#### CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF

The book of Revelation gives us a choice just as Joshua (who was a foreshadow of Jesus) gave to the Israelites before they crossed over the Jordan into the promised land. (Joshua 24:15) We can "keep" the words of the book if we belong to God, or continue doing evil. Daniel said that those who are evil will not understand, but those who are wise will. (Dan. 11:33, 12:10) Let's encourage one another to be wise and faithful! (Heb. 10:23-25, Jam. 5:19-20)

***We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is***

**good.** *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Romans 12:6-21*

*And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. **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 22:10-21*

Written by Tricia Berg, July 2017, 30pp.

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