

Testing You

by Tricia Berg

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. Deuteronomy 8:2

Do you love Jesus? I mean REALLY love Him, in the way that He defined with His own words—not just in your own way (the Word "according to you," loving only the fluffy words that promise good things for yourself and people you love), but ALL of His words?

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." John 14:15-24

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

"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good

treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:43-49

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit [humble], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn [due to unrighteousness - Malachi 3, especially Mal. 3:16-18], for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek [gentle], for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:1-20

Why did Jesus say that our righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees of that day? What were they doing wrong? Did they not believe

in God? They claimed to, and they did lots of "good works," but much of it was in order to be SEEN by others and much of it violated the spirit of the law while making a show of conforming to the letter. (Matt. 6:1-8, 15:1-20, Matt. 23, Luke 11:37-54, John 4:23, 5:37-47, Heb. 10:5-7) God told them repeatedly that He wants the sacrifices of being just, caring for the poor, widows and orphans, loving Him and each other from their hearts—not by rote and ritual according to a set of rules.

They mistakenly thought they could earn salvation (justify themselves) by keeping the law rather than "enter into God's rest" on His terms. (Heb. 3, 4) God's way was different from what they expected. (Isa. 55:8-9) They misunderstood Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and other Scriptures foretelling Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes loved the prestige, profit and power they had over the people in enforcing rules (to which they had added many details not specified by God) and didn't want to give it up—not even for God's own Son. They felt very threatened by His challenging the status quo. (Luke 6:7, 11:53-54, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 20:19-20, 26, Mark 3:2, 12:13 John 8:6, Matt. 12:10, 22:15)

We are "clothed in Jesus" and His righteousness when we believe; however, we are not meant to immediately set about soiling our pristine white garment. (Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:27, 5:24, 2Pet. 2:18-22, 2Tim. 2:19, Heb. 10:26-31, Rev. 3:2-6, Jam. 1:27, Jude 1:23) Today, we still have false teachings about works and other ways to salvation, as well as people on the other side of the spectrum who teach that God loves sin now that Jesus died for it. In what universe could that possibly ever make sense? He died to enable us to continue in our sin instead of to save us from it and the enslavement it HAD over us before we believed and had His Spirit to help us ("the Helper") overcome? That's not what my Bible says! (John 14:15-26, Rom. 6) But it's profitable to tell people what they love to hear, and that is all the wolves in sheep's clothing care about. (2Tim. 4:3, Matt. 7:15, Acts 20:26-31, 1Tim. 6:3-12, 2Tim. 3:1-9, 2Pet. 2—What is the opposite of "denying" the Master who bought us? It is obeying Him—not only "believing" in Him in our heads, but having the "firstfruits" of wisdom—the fear of the Lord and doing as He says!) (Psalm 111:10, Jer. 23:21-22)

We are under the "law of Christ" in the form of two main commandments given by Jesus, because by fulfilling them, we will fulfill them all. (1Cor. 9:21) It is not possible to keep these two and yet somehow break any of the others. (This should give us a clue that, since God doesn't contradict Himself, He is not telling us to "love" anyone by approving of their sin, joining in their sin, or causing them to sin. 1Thess. 4:1-8, Gal. 6:1, Jam. 5:19-20, Rom. 1:32) No one can do

this by their own power, and indeed, we all slip—but the Holy Spirit within us, IF we are truly born again believers (John 1:12-13, 3:3, 1John 3:24, 4:13), will help us to desire to know and do God's will and He will help us—that includes His convicting us when we have sinned so that we will repent and receive forgiveness. (Philip. 2:12-16, Eph. 4:17-32, 1Thess. 5:19-22) God gives us a way out whenever He allows us to be tempted/tested. (1Cor. 10:6-13, James 1:13-16)

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

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

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. James 2:8

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 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 1:19-27

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 1:5-2:6

So we have choices. We BELIEVERS can love God with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength and SHOW IT by obeying His "royal law" to love our neighbor as ourselves and the "law of liberty" by behaving as children of God SHOULD, not using our freedom to sin and cause His holy name to be defiled. (Rom. 6, James 2:14-26, Gal. 5:13-25) Or, we can pretend that God doesn't see inside of our wicked hearts and do as we please, as though that is how we show love for Him (or anyone, for that matter).(Matt. 15:18-20, Rev. 2:21-23, 3:19, Titus 2:11-15, Heb. 4:12-13) But just remember, whoever chooses the second one shouldn't claim His promises for themselves. Those were made to those who love Him. We will know if He loves us when He disciplines us for disobeying Him. (Rev. 3:15-19, Heb. 12, 1Cor. 4:18-21, 11:32) If He lets us get away with it indefinitely (He is patient - 2Pet. 3:9, Gal. 6:1-10), we are not legitimate children. (Heb. 12:5-17, 28-29) (If we don't believe that Jesus, the Son of God,

died for our sins and rose from the dead, then we have condemned ourselves and can anticipate eternal judgment. John 3:16-18, 2Thess. 2:7-12, Rev. 20:11-15)

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

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 2:21-22

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

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? James 2:5

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. Hebrews 10:36

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:17-21

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. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 1 Corinthians 3:11-20

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers." You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. Psalm 50:14-21

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9

If you are a false teacher who tells people that God expects NOTHING of them except to believe, repent! Teachers will be held to a higher standard on judgment day. (James 3:1) Faith is a gift from God, but we who have been adopted as God's children were meant to do good works so that God will be glorified in and through us. (Eph. 2:8-10, Matt. 5:13-16, John 13:35, 15:8-10, Titus 3:8, Rom. 8:13-17) It is of NO USE for an unbeliever to try to please God. (Heb. 11:6, 1John 2:23, Rom. 8:6-8)

Once we have been redeemed by Jesus, we BELONG to Him, heart and soul. (1Cor. 6:9-20, Rev. 5:9-10) That is when we can begin to show that our love for and faith in Him is genuine by the way we respond to His great love in saving us. (1Pet. 1:6-7, Rom. 8:13-23) We are meant to endure until either He takes us home or He returns for those of His own still living. (Read the letters to the churches in Rev. 2-3, the end-time parables in Matt. 25, Phil. 3:8-16, John 14:2-3, 1Thess. 4:16-17, 1Cor. 15:51-52.)

And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. 2 John 1:6-11

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. 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk

but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 2:28-3:24

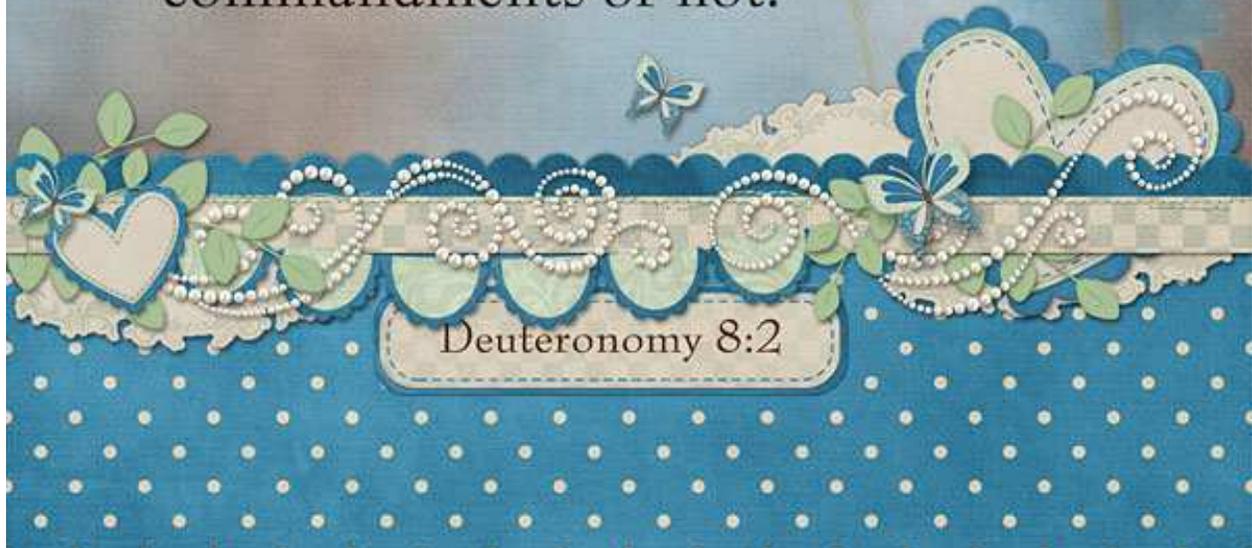
"And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the 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 8:29-36

Let's examine ourselves (2Cor. 13:5) and ask God to reveal anything in our walk that He is not pleased with. (Psa. 139:23-24, Eph. 4:1, 1Thess. 2:12) The more we read our Bibles, the more we will be able to discern His will, build our faith (according to knowledge of the truth - Col. 1:9-12) and yield to His indwelling Spirit so that we can have a clear conscience and be filled with His joy. (Titus 2:11-15, Gal. 5:24-25, 1John 4:17-18, John 15:10-11, 1John 3:18-24) Then we'll also be ready for His return. (Matt. 25:1-13, Mark 13:32-37)

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. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:15-21

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