

Your Team by Tricia Berg

As I write, baseball and softball seasons are in full swing. Earlier, people picked the members to play on their teams, put in countless hours of practice, and so on. Perhaps some who previously played for one team are now playing for another. Things change constantly in this world, including in sports, so we never can know what to expect. Not so with God and our eternal destination. He has promised an unchanging, glorious inheritance to those who are His own, and to those who are not His, the future is just as certain, only not at all bright.

To anyone who isn't sure which *eternal* team they are on yet, now would be a good time to get that straight. Just as with sports, there are only two sides—everyone is on one or the other. The two options are: 1) eternal bliss with God living among us, or 2) eternal torment with Satan and his evil angels. This isn't something to take lightly.

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but **whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**" John 3:16-19*

*Jesus said: "**Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.**" Matthew 12:30 (Also see Matt. 10:32-33, Luke 12:8-9, John 12:25-26)*

Only God can draw a soul to Himself. He draws near to those who seek Him and respond to His calling. (*Jam. 4:8, John 6:44, Matt. 8:22, Mark 1:17, John 6:37-40*) So my main focus will be on the *consequences* of the choice made once that has occurred. Jesus said to count the cost in advance. (*Luke 14:27-33, Luke 9:62*) There seem to be a wide variety of conflicting teachings, and so many are confused. Salvation (which is justification—being declared "not guilty"/atonement—being "made right" with God) is a one-time event, but believers then undergo a lifelong process called sanctification (which is being perfected and made holy, in the image of Jesus). (*Rom. 8:29, 1Pet. 1:15-16*) We are sanctified in God's eyes at the time we come to believe even though we can see that in a practical sense we have much growing and maturing in Christ

yet to do. (*1Pet. 2:2-3, Heb. 5:12-14, Heb. 6:1-3, 1Cor. 3:1-3, Gal. 2:20*) We were cleansed and purified, but because we still live on the earth in these weak bodies of flesh, there is constant temptation and danger of becoming dirty again. (*2Cor. 10:3-6, 1Pet. 4:1-5, Rom. 8:5-11*) We will not be fully sanctified until we depart this earth and are glorified as well. (*Rom. 8:12-30, 2Thess. 1:9-12*)

PREPARATION

If you think about it, even baseball fans make preparations before attending a game, right? They buy a ticket, plan their route and how long it takes to get there, make sure they have enough gas, bring along food to tailgate or money to buy it there, etc. They also make sure their favorite sports team shirt is clean. Jesus provides us with a pristine white garment when He washes away our sins. We need to keep it on and keep it white by walking WITH Him. (This is also referred to as walking IN Him or in the Spirit.) If we find at the last minute that the shirt we were going to wear to the game was in the wash, we could buy a new one at the game. Not so with the garment of salvation and robe of righteousness. **JESUS is the ONLY provider of that garment and the ONLY one who can wash away new stains that appear after we received it.** (*Rev. 3:4, 16:15, 1John 1:9*)

Jesus told a parable about a man not having the sense to count the cost before starting a building project. (*Luke 14:25-35*) This would be like having enough money to buy the ticket, but how does it correlate to salvation? Jesus said we need to give up all claim on our lives for Him IF we love Him and want to follow Him. If we're not willing to do that, then we don't have sufficient funds to finish what we started. We can't BUY salvation—not with money or good deeds. The "ticket" is free, but when we turn back, deciding not to continue on the journey we started, it's like throwing away our ticket or turning the car around and going back home (to the world, in this case.) (*1John 2:19, John 6:60-71, Heb. 10:36-39*) So in other words, this is NOT a game.

Jesus also told a parable about ten virgins who were waiting for the bridegroom, but half of them ran out of oil in their lamps before he arrived. This would be similar to having enough gas to drive to the game. The one who runs out might miss the game by the time they walk who knows how far to get gas and then back again to their car. The five foolish virgins realized they had run out of oil for their lamps (His word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path and faith comes by hearing the word - *Psa. 119:105, Rom. 10:17*) as he was arriving and went to buy some, but they MISSED it when those who were READY went in with him. Jesus warns that we are to "keep our tanks full" of the

Holy Spirit through His word. We're to keep watch (walk in the Spirit, paying attention to how we live—for His glory, not for ourselves) and be ready (found faithfully serving Him when He returns) at all times. (*Matt. 24:42-25*)

OBEDIENCE

We probably have in mind a checklist of items to bring with us to the game. These things help us to enjoy the game more - hat, sunscreen, camera, etc. If we are told NOT to bring certain items, we will abide by those rules, won't we? They might not let us in otherwise. (*2Tim. 2:3-5, 1Cor. 9:24-27*) Should we take preparations for eternal life less seriously than we do when we attend a baseball game? It's a sad fact that the majority do just that. Jesus said the gate is narrow, but people think they can squeeze all their junk through it. They want to keep one foot in the world and one in the next. Those who are wise will not consider the worthless treasures of this world as more valuable than the kingdom of God. (*Matt. 6:19-34, Matt. 13:44-46*)

There is a difference between a sheep who has lost its way and can't find the way back home and a person who is deliberately running away and hiding from God. Ask Jonah how that worked out for him! (*Jonah 1-4*) Jesus came to seek and save the LOST. (*Luke 19:10*) The father in the parable of the prodigal son waited for him to return. He didn't run after him, pleading with him. He waited patiently for him to regain his senses and come back home. When he did, his father rejoiced and forgave him for his disgraceful behavior. (*Luke 15:11-31*) Our Father has what we need and, if we have any sense, what we WANT. He doesn't beg or force us to accept it. He won't, because 1) He is GOD, our Creator - we answer to Him, not the other way around, and 2) that would not prove our faith in and love for Him to be genuine.

No amount of "working on ourselves" will make us holy or perfect, but His Spirit transforms us from within with our cooperation. God doesn't force us to believe, nor does He force us to obey Him (but we are exhorted to do both, because we CAN use the gift of our free will to unwisely resist Him). He uses various means to make His will known, most importantly His Holy Spirit through His Holy Word. He draws us to the well and offers us the water of life to drink, but he doesn't force us to drink it. Once we drink it, that water should well up inside of us and overflow, not become poisonous or be kept only for ourselves. We are meant to be lights drawing people like moths to Jesus; like the salt of the earth. (*John 4:13-14, James 3:9-12, Col. 2:6-7, Matt. 5:13-16, Rev. 22:17*)

LOYALTY

If we believe Jesus, the **Son of God**, died to pay the full penalty for our sins and rose again, and will be returning for those who are His, we are not meant to go along with the flow and blend in. Our lives should be different in a good way, so that others will see how good our God is. (2Tim. 3:12, Matt. 5:10-16, John 14:2-3, 1Thess. 4:16-17, John 17:6) Needless to say, if we appear to be the same as everyone else, then there will be no persecution as we were told to expect, will there? It undoubtedly makes our earthly lives easier when we don't "rock the boat," but we will have to give an answer to God for how we lived after receiving such a great and precious gift of eternal life, not to each other. (Gal. 1:10, 2Tim. 2:4-7)

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me." John 15:18-21

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. James 4:4-10

What if our friends and family all live in the same worldly way and we don't want to seem "weird" to take salvation "too seriously"? There were people like that in Jesus' day—people who believed but didn't follow Him. They didn't want to be persecuted for going against the flow. Jesus said if we love anyone more than Him, we're not worthy of Him. He said that those who do the will of God

are His family. We should think in the same way since it is only through Him that we are adopted into God's family. (*Mark 3:31-35, Rom. 8:29, Gal. 4:4-6*) Our attitude should be a desire to reach the lost, not to join them. (*Psa. 37, Psa. 73*)

*Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but **for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.** And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me **may not remain in darkness.**"* *John 12:42-46*

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. *Matthew 10:37-39*

FOLLOWERS

Jesus didn't come to make people feel comfortable in their sins. He came because He is the ONLY one who could take their sins away. He was the only one who could perfectly keep the law so that His sacrifice of Himself could atone for OUR sins. (*Rom. 3:23-26, John 8:23-24*) He is offering NEW life to sinners, who are under the sentence of death. He made it clear to everyone that repentance IS required. (*John 5:14, John 8:10-11*) He came to light a fire—to separate the wheat from the chaff. John the Baptist warned people that just claiming to belong to God was not enough. (*Matt. 3:7-12, Luke 12:49-53*) That includes believers separating themselves from the world AND from people who love it, who would hinder us from following Jesus. (*Matt. 19:20-22, Matt. 8:22, John 8:44, 1Cor. 15:33-34*) (This does not mean abandoning your spouse and young children who need you. *1Cor. 7:10-17, 1Tim. 5:8*)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore **go out from their midst, and be separate from them,** says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I

*will welcome you, and **I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me**, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-18*

Whoever chooses to be on the team opposing God (remember, you are either FOR or AGAINST—there are NO neutral observers in this battle between God and Satan) will be *deceived* by the coming evil one (if they are alive then) *and will join him in his eternal punishment*. Only those whose names are in Jesus' book of life will recognize the signs and wonders he is allowed to perform to be false, and hold fast to Jesus even unto physical death if necessary, to gain their eternal lives.

*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and **the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.** Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. **The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.** 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12*

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two

*months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. **Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.** Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. Revelation 13:1-18*

*And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "**If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.**" Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:9-13*

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **And I***

saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15

RAPTURE

If you are a believer and are positive that you will be raptured prior to the reign of the beast, I am not disrespecting your beloved pastor or favorite, most trusted Bible scholar. However, we must each consult the full counsel of God and let His Spirit within us help us to understand, always checking what they say against the Bible. (*Acts 17:11, John 14:26*) Something to consider in YOUR personal study is that the seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 were addressed to CHURCHES. In other words, they are ALL written to *professed* believers. When we read those letters, we can see a little bit of ourselves in most of them, can't we? Each letter was to be read by each church, even though there were individual messages particular to each one. We can likewise learn from them to see what Jesus wants us to do—in a word, OVERCOME. He warned us that we WILL have tribulation, but we know that because He has overcome it, then we can, too, by HIS power within us. (*Rev. 16:33, 1John 4:4*)

Notice that only ONE of the churches (Philadelphia) was promised to be SPARED (how that is accomplished is not specified, but the open door in Rev. 3:7-8 *seems* to point to the one in Rev. 4:1) from the "hour of trial to come on the whole world" which appears to be the "reign of the beast" (which is Satan's wrath, part of God's perfect plan for testing those who dwell on the earth - *Rev. 12:12, Rom. 9:22*). (*Rev. 3:10, Rev. 17:12*) Why would He keep those of the Church of Philadelphia from it? He tell us! It's because they had ALREADY unswervingly endured persecution—to such a degree as to prompt Him to promise them that their persecutors will bow before their feet. (*Rev. 3:9, 2Thess. 1:4-10, Matt. 5:10-12*) They hadn't denied Jesus even though it was painful for them, and yet even they were told to HOLD FAST to their crowns and overcome in order to receive the promised reward. (*Rev. 3:11, Gal. 4:28-29, Heb. 6:11-12, Heb. 10:23-39 (especially v. 36), James 1:2-4, 1:12, 2:5, 2Tim. 4:6-8*)

God alone will determine who (among those living at the time) has and who has not endured sufficient persecution without wavering, such that they have "tested out" of the "hour of trial" because they have "passed" the test of faith and been found to be genuine. (1Pet. 1:6-7) Therefore, I don't feel that it is ethical to assure all who *claim* to be believers (no matter whether their lives even display fruit of the Spirit or not - Gal. 5:22-25) that they are members of the "Church of Philadelphia" and thus will somehow be spared going through ANY tribulation (as opposed to *God's wrath*). Tribulation clearly comes *before* God's wrath/the Day of the Lord. Notice that the order of events in the sun, moon and stars compared with tribulation and the Day of the Lord. Also, the "lawless one" reveals himself not at the beginning of his rule, but when he commits the abomination that makes desolation. Prior to that, he is promising peace. (Dan. 9:27) Even after that point, it is not yet the Day of the Lord but the beginning of birth pangs. (2Thess. 2:1-4, Matt. 24:23-28)

*"Immediately **after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Matthew 24:29*

*And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, **before the day of the Lord comes**, the great and magnificent day. Acts 2:19-20*

Likewise, I feel it's inappropriate and even dangerous to assure people who once checked a box on a card saying they accepted Christ as their Savior (or something similar) that they are eternally saved even though they have lived as enemies of the cross ever since—with no change whatsoever in their lifestyle. True believers are a new creation in Christ and that reality will gradually be revealed from the inside out over time. (Philip. 3:17-19, Philip. 2:12-13) That is not "working for salvation," it is working "out" salvation, *through the power of the Holy Spirit within*. If He is not present, then we have not been born again. (Romans 8:6-14) TODAY is the day to give your whole heart to God and surrender to His perfect will and transforming power if you previously only made a verbal confession of faith, or none at all. The big question isn't when Jesus will return, but when OUR OWN personal appointment with God will be. There will be a time coming when it will be too late to "switch teams." God is going to send a delusion on those who refused to love the truth while they had the chance during this age of grace. (2Thess. 2:9-12, Rev. 13:11-14) He is not interested in FANS, but in serious, honest "competitors" (to run the good race, fight the good fight of faith and win souls).

WRATH OR TRIBULATION

Back to our discussion about the letters to the Churches, why didn't Jesus just have John write *one* letter, to Philadelphia, saying they are the only ones who are the *true* church and everyone else will perish? Or why did He offer hope to the others even though they were not given a promise to be *spared*? I think that it is because the others *won't all perish*—MANY will NOT be deceived by the antichrist. Who are those people who refuse the mark of the beast and are martyred if they are not believers whose names are written in the book of life? (Remember, everyone on earth whose name is NOT in the book *will* be deceived, take the mark and worship the beast.) But if they are on the earth at this time and their names are in the Lamb's book of life, but they are not kept from it somehow as promised to the Church of Philadelphia, then they will be purified and refined through tribulation—made worthy of the Lamb, even if it costs them their physical lives. (*Matt. 10:26-39, Matt. 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, Dan. 11:33-34, 12:10, Dan. 7:21-22*) They will overcome by holding fast until the end of the trial. (*Rev. 2:7, 11, 26, Rev. 3:5, 21, Rev. 13:7-10, 21:27, Rev. 7:14*)

The church is not appointed to God's *wrath*, but God uses tribulation and trial (throughout the age) to purify and refine our faith. (*1Pet. 1:6-9, Acts 5:41, 2Thess. 1:4-10, 1Pet. 4:12-19, 1Pet. 5:6-10, Romans 8:16-19, Acts 14:21-22, Heb. 12, Luke 22:31, Mark 9:49-50, Isa. 48:10*) For us to say that we couldn't possibly go through the hour of trial/reign of the beast would be to suggest that God loves us believers in this age more than He loved those in ages past? We know that is simply not true! Suffering for Jesus' sake is to be viewed as a privilege. (*Acts 5:41, 9:16, Philip. 1:29-30, Heb. 13:13, 1Pet. 2:21*)

God is perfectly able to protect His people from His own wrath. The Israelites were in Egypt during all ten plagues, yet not harmed by any of them (whereas only the last one, the Passover, refers to Jesus' atonement as the Lamb of God). The Israelites did suffer at the hand of the Egyptians, though. Lot was not removed from the earth, but to a safe location when Sodom and the other cities like it were destroyed. (*Gen. 19:15-26*) (Note that Lot was brought to safety inside the house by the angels while the blind men, probably also representing spiritual blindness in addition to their depravity, sought to harm them through the night. The city was destroyed at dawn.) The woman who gives birth in Rev. 12 (who is a "sign" not a literal woman) is taken to a place prepared for her in the wilderness. (*Rev. 12:1-6, 13-16*) Before Elijah was taken up to heaven in the chariot, he was cared for by birds in the wilderness for a period of time and then in the house of a widow for 3 ½ years during drought. (*1Kings 17, Luke*

24:25-26) Elisha sent a woman to take shelter elsewhere for 7 years during a drought as well. (2Kings 8) So God is able.

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and **if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked** (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then **the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,** 2 Peter 2:4-10*

Once Jesus removes those who are His from the earth, including those who died abiding IN Him and those still alive (this is the first resurrection—the rest live after the millennium. Rev. 20, Heb. 9:27-28, 1Thess. 4:16-17, 1Cor. 15:51-52), God's wrath will begin in earnest. (Isa. 26:20-21, Zeph. 2:3, Rev. 15:5-8, Rev. 6:12-17, Rev. 15:1, Rev. 11:15-19) Please understand that “abiding” does NOT mean simply professing faith without following Jesus—it means to love, serve, honor and obey, to bear fruit. (John 15:8-14)

WALK IN HIS STEPS

Jesus Himself is Head of the Church and our judge (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23, Col. 1:18, 2Cor. 5:10), and He is not happy with at least some aspects of the "walk" of five of the other six churches. (Smyrna is told to endure despite having no faults pointed out. Rev. 2:9-11, 1Pet. 2:21) Some true believers will be saved “as through the fire” but with loss of reward. (1Cor. 3:10-17) I believe this is why Paul exhorts us all so strenuously that we should “run a good race” and “fight the good fight.” There is great reward in it. If it were as simple as making a confession of faith, Paul most certainly would already have “attained” it. A clue may be in the word “ek” in Greek, which means “out of.” The word we use for “church” is “ekklesia,” meaning “called out.” Paul uses it in reference to the resurrection. (1Tim. 6:12) Obviously everyone, good and bad, will be resurrected eventually, but not to the same eternal reality. Toward the end of his ministry and life, Paul expresses that he knows that he has accomplished his goal (through the power of Christ, of course). (2Tim. 4:6-8) “Those who love

His appearing” are the same ones who have no need to “shrink back in shame at His coming.” (1John 2:28-29, Heb. 10:32-39) (i.e. overcomers - Gal. 6:17, Col. 1:24-26, Acts 20:22-31)

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake **I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection out from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.** But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. 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 3:7-21*

REWARDS

Sadly, Jesus is not pleased with *any* aspect of the last church addressed in Rev. 2-3, Laodicea. He is being merciful in warning them (and us) of what it takes to be counted worthy of the kingdom. (1Thess. 2:10-12, 2Thess. 1:5, Acts 5:40-42, 2Pet. 1:8-11) Notice that being worthy is never connected to salvation (only belief), but it IS connected to the kingdom? This is about rewards. This is one case where it’s NOT “the thought that counts,” but about putting your money (and your very LIFE) where your mouth is. This is about “in truth and Spirit” not “rote and ritual.” (John 4:23, Matt. 15:8-9)

It *matters* whether we receive our FULL reward from Him, because it brings HIM (who is our life and our very heart - *Col. 3:4, 1Pet. 1:8-9*) glory, honor and pleasure to reward us for our faithfulness to Him. (*Rev. 4:10, 11:18, Rev. 20:6, 1Cor. 3:14-16*) Is part of that potential reward the honor of reigning with Him "with a rod of iron" during the millennium, as part of the first resurrection? (*Rev. 2:26-27, 3:21*) Paul seemed to think so—he certainly didn't question his own faith, as though he needed to contribute to his salvation. (*Philip. 3:8-21, 1Cor. 9:24-10:13*) Paul also said the Thessalonians were his crown of glory and exhorted them to live in a manner worthy of the Lord. (*1Thess. 2:19-20, 1Thess. 4:1-12*)

Notice Jesus didn't say in *Matt. 19:19-23*, "You who merely made a verbal confession of faith," but they FOLLOWED and gave up everything for Him. (*Luke 9:62*) Peter said to practice qualities that demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, not to forget that we have been cleansed of our former sins, but to confirm our calling and election so that we may look forward to being granted entrance into the kingdom. (*2Pet. 1:5-12*) And the writer of Hebrews was very concerned with persevering in faith until the end. (*Heb. 3:5-14, Heb. 6:4-12, Heb. 12*) We must never deny or be ashamed of Jesus and our faith in Him, no matter what may happen. If we keep our mouths shut now because the world hates our message to the "extreme" point of calling us names or "unfriending" us, what will we do when they threaten our very lives? (*Luke 19:37-40, Matt. 10:17-22*)

ISRAEL

Some say the entire tribulation refers only to Israel, not the church, but remember that the church is *grafted into* Israel. (*Rom. 11:11-32*) Again, six of the CHURCHES are *not* promised to be *kept from* the "hour of trial to come on the whole world," but rather they are exhorted to overcome by enduring until Jesus returns (before God's wrath begins). If they do not wake up and keep watch, He will come upon them like a thief in the night. (*Matt. 24:42-44, Luke 12:38-40, 1Thess. 5:1-11, Rev. 17:14*) doesn't say that the "called, chosen and professing to believe" return with Jesus. It says the "called, chosen and FAITHFUL" return with Him. The faith of these souls was tested and found to be REAL. They didn't fall away the minute things got tough. The second death will not hurt them—they are part of the *first* resurrection. (*Rev. 20:1-2*)

We (the Church—Jewish and Gentile believers in this age) are special in that we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant, whereas the vast majority of God's people in the Old Covenant did not receive the Spirit. It doesn't mean that God will not test, discipline and chastise us the same as He has always done, but that we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. Believers in this age have

been given by the Father to Jesus. (*John 17:6, Rom. 8:23, James 1:18, 1Pet. 1:6-7, Heb. 12, Rev. 3:19*) We have already entered into the New Covenant. (*Luke 22:19-20, 1Cor. 11:23-25, 2Cor. 3:2-6*) The Old Covenant is obsolete. (*Heb. 8:13*) This was foretold in the Old Testament. It is not a changing of God's mind, but part of the plan all along. (*Jer. 31:31-33*)

When those Jews who are presently "hardened of heart" from accepting the Gospel "recover" from their condition (at the time the fullness of the Gentiles comes in), they will enter into the New Covenant as well. (*Heb. 8-9, Romans 11:11, 25*) Now that Christ has come and finished His perfect work of redemption, the only way to have peace with God is through Him. (*Acts 4:12, Heb. 1, 1Tim. 2:5-6, 1Cor. 3:11, 1John 1:5-2:6, 1John 5:10-12*) Prior to that people were saved by faith as well, but they needed to believe that if they were obedient, God would accept them. Their transgressions were only taken away temporarily by repeated animal sacrifices, but they believed in the promise of the future Savior. (*Heb. 11:6*) God has made one new man from the two through Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant. (*Heb. 2:11-22, Gal. 3:28*) Jesus said He was making one flock from the two. (*John 10:16*) Notice how the New Jerusalem has twelve foundations with the names of the apostles and twelve gates with the names of the tribe of Israel, and Jesus has 24 elders? (*Rev. 21:2, 21:12-14, Rev. 4:3-4, Isa. 24:23*)

STAY AWAKE

Am I saying that there is no such thing as a rapture and the church will suffer God's wrath? **No** (but I have separated the "tribulation" from the "Day of the Lord" according to the Bible, not my own preference). The inclusion of Gentiles along with believing Jews in the Body of Christ, indwelt by His Spirit, was a "mystery" to the Old Testament prophets, revealed first to Peter in Acts 10 and then to Paul, who was made the apostle to the Gentiles. (*Rom. 16:25-27, Rom. 10:16-21, Rom. 11:11-13, Gal. 2:7-8, 1Tim. 2:7, Eph. 1:7-10, Eph. 3:1-12, Eph. 5:32, Col. 1:18-29, 1Pet. 1:10-12, Rev. 10:5-7*) This was due to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews as a whole. (*Matt. 21:42-44, Rom. 11:28-32 Acts 2:21*) I actually think that those "given" to Jesus by the Father (*John 6:37, 17:6*) will reach their full number at the same time as the "fullness of the Gentiles comes in" (*Rom. 11:25*), at which time the Church, which is His Body, will be complete and gathered to Him.

We need to be ready. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, but not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. (*Matt. 7:21*) This seems at first glance to be contradictory, but Jesus is to be LORD. If we call on Him *without* our HEARTS, without any intention

whatsoever of obeying Him, but only with our lips, then we have made a *false* confession (and He knows our very thoughts). (Rom. 10:8-10, Rev. 2:23) Obedience is required to "see Jesus" and "enter the Kingdom." (Rom. 8:19) The kingdom is "within" is another way of saying that we must be born again to be heirs of the kingdom. (Luke 17:20-21)

*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful **fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **Strive** for peace with everyone, and **for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord**. See to it that no one **fails to obtain the grace of God**; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, **when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.** Hebrews 12:11-17*

"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. "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." John 14:15-26

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb

and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit. John 3:3-6

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already **you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** If you abide in me, and **my words abide in you,** ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **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 15:1-14

DEVOTION

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit upon belief, but yet in John 14-16, Jesus equates obedience with love and makes it a requirement of the Spirit making His home in us (which is what "born again" is) and our abiding in Him. (Luke 17:21) Repentance, forgiveness and cleansing by Jesus' blood are necessary to maintain a holy temple where God resides. We don't earn salvation, but we don't play games with God once we have it. Those who do not LOVE Jesus (as shown by their actions, words and attitudes—He expects to be OBEYED) are NOT born again. To know Him is to love Him. (1John 3:6) Faith without works is just as dead as works without faith. (Jam. 2:14-26, 2Pet. 1:3-12) This would explain why so many people CLAIM to believe, yet show NO fruits of the Spirit. They are not born again. (John 6:63) Their spirits are still "dead," not regenerated by the Holy Spirit who makes us new in Christ. (Rom. 6:4, John 6:63, 2Cor. 5:17)

Rather than take the precious gift of salvation for granted and go on living as we did before, we should treasure it. (*Col. 2:1-15*) The joy of our salvation is what sustains us in difficult circumstances so that we can endure and even be content. (*Philip. 4:4-20*) We need be ready to stand firm for Christ no matter what happens and be ready for His return no matter when that is. It's over when God decides it's over and nothing we can do will change it. If we KNOW Him, then we have no desire to change it, as all of His ways are perfect, good and right. There is NO reason to fear. God knows each of us better than we know ourselves. He will not allow any of us to be tempted or tried beyond our ability to resist. (*2Pet. 2:9, 2Cor. 10:13, 1John 1:18, James 4:7*) My point is not to scare anyone, but that we should settle it in the depths of our souls that whatever happens, we know that this life is temporary and our home is in heaven. Our physical bodies are "tents" or tabernacles/temples for the spiritual presence of the Lord. He will decide when it is time to "pull up the stakes" and welcome us home to Himself. (*2Cor. 5, 2Peter 1, 1Cor. 3:16, 1Cor. 6:19-20*) We are NEVER alone. (*Heb. 13:5-6, Matt. 10:28*)

Make sure not to claim the glorious promises of heavenly inheritance in Ephesians, Colossians and other Scriptures without heeding the admonition on how we "once walked" as Gentiles in our sins, but now we must grow in maturity, heed the prompting of the Holy Spirit and walk in a worthy manner. God is not interested in lip service, but in our whole hearts. (*Mark 7:6-5, John 4:23*) We have no ability whatsoever to obey of our own power, with unregenerated spirits—it is through His Spirit giving us new life when we TRULY believe in our hearts that makes it possible (*Rom. 8:5-14, Philip. 2:12-16*) (but it is STILL a choice - God doesn't force us to believe OR obey). We could in NO WAY EVER earn, deserve or repay our salvation, but once we ARE saved, we owe our entire lives and hearts to God. (*Matt. 10:32-39, Luke 9:62, 2Tim. 2:19-22, Heb. 12:14-28, 1Cor. 9:10, Rev. 3:4, 1John 2:1-6, Gal. 6:7-10, 2Cor. 7:1, Eph. 4:17-24, Col. 3:1-11, Rom. 6, 7:1*) If we are born again (and we must be in order to enter the kingdom of heaven), then we are one spirit with Jesus, who is HOLY. (*John 3:3, 1Cor. 6:16-20*)

OPEN DOOR

Notice in the following passage, Paul considers it an "open door" if he can tell someone about Jesus, even when he's in prison. He exhorts us to be gracious and yet season our speech with salt. (In other words, don't be argumentative and rude, but don't just agree with people who oppose God's ways in order to make your own life easier or to seem "nice," either.) We're not meant to toss everything we know of God out the window in order to placate the world.

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may **open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison**—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Colossians 4:2-6*

The above passage reminds me of the testimonies we hear on Voice of the Martyrs. We know that in *Rev. 12:10-12*, those who now dwell in heaven conquered because they “loved not their lives unto death.” Not all of the persecuted Christians in various places today are killed, but all endure suffering. They have persevered through persecution and many have been imprisoned for Jesus’ sake. They would welcome an “open door” like Paul and Silas experienced when in prison. (*Acts 16:25-26, Rev. 3:7-8*)

The one who *loves* Jesus is the one who *obeys* Jesus—that is who He “knows” because His Spirit dwells within them. (*John 14:15-24, John 15:8-14, 1Thess. 4:3-8, 1John 2:1-6, 1John 3:9, 24*) That person ABIDES in Jesus and obeys out of LOVE, keeping their “lamp filled with oil,” from hearing the word. (*Rom. 10:17, Luke 18:8, Psa. 119:05, Matt. 25:1-13, Rev. 2:3-5*) In this way, they know what He expects of them, and they make His priorities their highest priorities. His honor and glory is their ultimate goal. If you think about it, would you believe someone if they said they loved you but they NEVER want to spend any time with you (or maybe just an hour once a week...) or even communicate with you—if they chose to spend all of their free time doing something else or with someone else, would you believe them? What about if they only do as you ask them to when they feel like it, or they don’t stand up for you when you are slandered, or even join in with your enemies? We may be able to fool others and even ourselves with fake faith, but God can’t be fooled. (*Gal. 6:7-8, Matt. 6:24*)

Let’s look at the flip side of the coin. When we do things to please someone we love, does that mean we are trying to bribe them? Do we only want them to give us something, or do we think that will make them love us? In this fallen world, sometimes that is our attitude toward each other and God, but that is a twisted view of love. Motive matters. If we’re trying to do “good works” (whether to “behave” or to do good “deeds”) because we think we can earn God’s love and salvation, that isn’t pleasing to Him. That’s not love—it’s choosing our own way instead of His ONE plan. If it’s based in fear of not receiving His love, that is a total lack of understanding His character—in other words not from knowledge of Him. (*Eph. 3:14-21*) Or, if we’re only after getting

things from Him, then our motive is greed and selfishness. Neither of those could ever be a good basis for a relationship.

We obey God because He first loved us. (*1 John 4:9-10*) Jesus died for us before we even knew we needed salvation, while we were ignorant sinners. (*Rom. 5:7-8*) Our obedience is in response to the love we have already received from Him, and in response to the truth enlightening us as to our lost condition. (*Rom. 6:20-23*) Now we can know what pleases Him from reading our Bibles and His Holy Spirit illuminating the Word for us. (*Eph. 5:8*) Our ability to please Him begins with faith. When we are adopted into God's family, that begins our accountability to Him and our new family. (*John 1:12-13, 2Cor. 5:14-15, Eph. 4:17-18, 1Pet. 4:3, Gal. 6:1-2*)

God doesn't change. (*Heb. 13:8, Mal. 3:6*) Don't consult a changing world for answers that are contained in the unchanging Bible that He inspired chosen men to write. (*2Tim. 3:16-17, Col. 1:9-11, 2Pet. 1:5-12, 2Pet. 3:18, 1Pet. 1:16-21*) His Spirit teaches believers so they can discern the truth. (*1John 2:24-29, James 1:5-8, 1Cor. 2:12-14*) If you are a believer and do not find this to be the case, then perhaps you don't read your Bible much. Reading a verse per day on a phone app or email will not reap the same results as investing time reading an actual Bible.

To those who say they don't believe—you are fooling yourself. (*Rom. 1:18-21*) It takes WAY more faith to believe that everything "just happened by chance" than to believe in God. But nevertheless, not believing does not change the fact that He exists any more than not believing in air, gravity or magnetism, which can't be seen either, will cause them to cease to exist. I hear you saying that we can see the EFFECTS of those things. Just as we can with God, if we will admit the absurdity of "the big bang" and "evolution." If I tried to sell you a lottery ticket with the odds of winning matching the odds of things falling into place as they would have to for the world and all life to begin as is hypothesized, you would have enough sense not to buy it. Those kinds of odds are the same as impossible, and no amount of time passing will improve them. Not only that, but with each new discovery in science, the odds get worse instead of better. God perfectly designed the universe for our planet and our habitat for our bodies, which He also designed. And what about the fact that for "things" to collide, they have to exist. Think about that one for a bit... Where did those very first things come from? Don't say anything collided with anything else until you can explain where those things came from in the first place. You can't, can you? That is because there is no explanation, except for God. His very name "I AM" is the explanation. He has always been and always will be, and there is NO OTHER. Period.

HOLD FAST

For those of us who have acknowledged that God is God and we are not, we were also to have surrendered our selfish ways in favor of His perfect ways. We are told SO many times to behave in a way that honors God and to hold fast to the truth until the end. Jesus promised not to lose or cast out any of those given to Him by God, but not that there would be no consequence for disobedience (separate from the eternal penalty for disobeying the Gospel in unbelief). His parables indicated that there WILL be a consequence. (*John 6:37-40, John 10:28-30, Matt. 18:32-35, Matt. 24:48-51, Matt. 25:10-13, Matt. 25:26-30, Luke 12:45-48, Luke 19:22-27* Also see *Jude 1:5-7*.) Jesus is not interested in lukewarm Christians making empty promises. (*Rev. 2:4-5, Rev. 2:14-16, Rev. 2:20-23, Rev. 3:1-3, Rev. 3:15-19*) How can anyone truly understand what He has done for us—the pain, anguish and suffering He endured on our behalf—and not want to give Him ALL? We were lost and He found us. We were dead and He gave us life. Is there such a thing as giving Him too much of ourselves in return? The earth and everything in it belongs to Him to begin with! (*Psa. 24:1*)

*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But **you are not in darkness**, brothers, for that day to **surprise** you like a thief. **For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But **since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.** For God has not destined us for **wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore **encourage one another and build one another up**, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*

Besides the fact that we should not be satisfied to give Jesus crumbs during this lifetime and suffer loss of reward for eternity, there is a very dire fact we must face. If we think that we will just be content to "settle for less" by choosing not to suffer: *If we are alive, on the earth (some who have already conquered dwell in heaven by then - Rev. 12:10-12), during the reign of the beast (the "hour of trial" - Rev. 3:10, Rev. 17:12), then we will be forced to take sides. We can't just say, "I'm fine with being part of the second resurrection," because a choice*

is REQUIRED between worshiping God (sealed by the Holy Spirit, possibly losing our physical life - *Matt. 10:28*) or the beast (taking his mark in order to buy and sell, therefore survive, thereby losing our *soul* to eternal punishment). Take notice that *cowardly* people are included in the list of people not allowed to enter the Holy City. (*Rev. 21:8*) God is our strength and hope of deliverance. (*Psa. 147:10-11*) The Israelites who refused to enter into the promised land due to unbelief in His almighty power to give them the victory, despite all of the wondrous signs they had just seen, ended up dying in the desert after wandering forty years. (*1Cor. 3:14-18, Rev. 22:14-20, Zeph. 3:11-13, Mal. 3:16-18, Psa. 95:6-11, Heb. 3-4*)

WARNINGS

To those who encourage others to ignore the book of Revelation, or even make them feel like they're doing something wrong to show an interest in it, I would really be worried if I were you about the warning in *Rev. 22:19*. I would repent of disparaging ANY part of God's word (even if you were taught to do so by the tradition of those you trust). For that matter, if I were a teacher making a profit from God's word and telling people what they like to hear—little snippets of fluff out of context—I would repent as well! (*Acts 20:26-32, 1Tim. 4:16, 1Tim. 6:3-16, 2Tim. 2, 2Pet. 2, Jude, Matt. 5:19, James 3:1, Titus 1:11, 2Tim. 4:1-4, 2John 1:8-11*) And for anyone who disdains Israel, thinking that they “blew it” forever and that we get all the good things promised to them, there is also a stern warning. (*Rom. 11:17-21, Jer. 31:31-37*) We are grafted in to Israel. If God were to forsake Israel, then He wouldn't be trustworthy and He wouldn't be OUR God, who never does ANYTHING wrong or even less than perfect. (*Psa. 89:20-37, Jer. 33:19-26, 35-37, Isa. 54:5-10*)

Regardless of anyone's view on the rapture, I believe that what is meant by "watching" and "being ready" and "staying awake" or "waking up" is to live as though Jesus were coming back at any moment, conscious of the fact that He will be requiring an account of each of us as to how we invested the gifts He gave us for the good of His kingdom. (*Matt. 25, Luke 19, Matt. 26:41, Matt. 5, Luke 11:33-36, Luke 12:35-40, Luke 21:34-36, 1Thess. 5:1-11, Rom. 13:11-14, 1Cor. 15:33-34, Heb. 2:1-4, Rev. 3:1-3*) Run the good race. No one "runs a race" when they make a one-time confession, but being a disciple is LIVING for Jesus, FOLLOWING Him. (*1Cor. 9:24-27, 1Cor. 15:33-34, Heb. 12:1, Philip. 3:8-21, John 12:25-26, John 15:8, Titus 3:8, Eph. 2:10, Heb. 3:5-6, Heb. 3:12-14*)

It is true that we can't save ourselves, even by choosing God of our own desire and will. However, He does draw people to Himself and if you feel that pull on

your heart, don't resist. If you are already a "member of His team," don't run the bases half-heartedly as if you have hit a grand slam because you "don't have to work for salvation" when it is already yours by grace through faith. Run like your life depends on it because the eternal lives of others who haven't yet heard DO depend on it - (Rom. 10:14-15), and because Jesus gave His ALL for us. How can we be pleased with ourselves for doing less?

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:44

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13

*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.** Hebrews 4:6-13*

*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so **be zealous and repent.** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:19-20*

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

*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. 2 Peter 3:8-13*

JESUS IS LORD

EVERY knee will bow and EVERY tongue will confess Jesus is Lord, but there is only reward for doing so during *this* lifetime. Once we have seen with our own eyes and want to change our mind—change teams, if you will—it will be too late. Choose wisely now!

*By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: **'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'** Isaiah 45:23*

*For it is written, **"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."** So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.* Romans 14:11-12

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that **at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Philippians 2:8-11*

*And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But **as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**" Joshua 24:15*

If you "think" you are "on God's team," but everyone around you would be surprised to hear that you consider yourself a Christian (in America we don't have to fear being killed for our faith, yet, and still people remain silent instead of standing up for Jesus—maybe because if we name the Name then we know we should live like it or else we are hypocrites - 2Tim. 2:19), then today would be a good day to repent of having lukewarm faith and get serious with God.

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

Written by Tricia Berg, May 2017, updated July 2017 24pp. *If this article has blessed you, please feel free to share it without modifications (and of course, don't claim it as your own or sell it)*