

# HEARING JESUS

Differences in Knowing and Living God's Word  
During Persecution and Suffering



Kirk W. McCrea

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*To my loving parents who guided my steps toward  
Jesus*



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*Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

(Matthew 24:9-13, NIV)

*All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.*

(John 16:1-3, NIV)

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a not too distant scenario, the persecution of Christians in previously free countries of the world has begun to happen. Perhaps the government has made it illegal for churches, ministries, and individuals to disagree with their world views. Perhaps it is a hate crime to tell people that Jesus is not pleased with various life-style choices and that He wants to rescue them from those choices. Perhaps the finances of many churches and ministries have been ruined by the loss of non-profit status, and congregants not proving compliance with certain philosophies are placed in a new tax bracket or are subject to disabling penalties. Perhaps non-believers start to take matters into their own hands and Church or congregant property is destroyed. Perhaps they start to make examples of individual Christians and their families. Believers start to lose everything, and then some are beaten and some are killed. It has all been done before, and it is currently happening throughout the world, today.

In this scenario, the important doctrinal debates of Christians that were once at stake do not seem to matter. Questions such as, is it God's predestination or people's free choice, should baptism be a sprinkle or full immersion, what's the best "English" version of the Bible, exactly what time does the End Time occur, or

why does one's church have all the correct doctrines while the rest don't?

Instead, the immediate questions at hand will be how to respond to a world that tells believers to stop believing in any doctrine at all, how to live under devastating financial situations, how to protect ones' family, or how to live a life that is constantly under threat? It will not be the same as the beginning of World War II, where people packed churches looking for answers and comfort. In this scenario, doing so will only put us on a list, and may put a target on our backs for those wishing to do us harm. In this scenario, there simply is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. The world has gone crazy against Jesus. The spirit of the anti-Christ has been allowed its hour within eternity that, to believers, may *feel* like an eternity.

The New Testament, however, is packed with instructions to believers on how to prepare for and endure persecution. The Heavenly Father, speaking through His Son, made it a high priority lesson for us, His children, during our short time on earth, and the Apostles reiterated it throughout their letters.

For example, Jesus told us, *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."* (John 15:18-20), and Jesus said of Paul, *"...for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (Acts 9:15-16).

Likewise, Paul strengthened *"the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith,*

*and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22); and said, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24).*

Finally, Jesus gave us seven *reasons* to "overcome" in the book of Revelation:

1. *"To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7);*
2. *"He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11);*
3. *"To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it" (Revelation 2:17);*
4. *"He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star" (Revelation 2:26-29);*
5. *"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (Revelation 3:5-6);*
6. *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new*

*Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name” (Revelation 3:12-13); and,*

7. *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21-22).*

Each of these seven reasons to overcome was accompanied by the same instruction necessary to overcome: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Thus, the key questions on preparing for persecution become: are we listening and can we hear?

Jesus, His prophets, and His Apostles told us and showed us how to overcome. To the self-preservation of our “outer man” or “flesh,” His instructions may look like the worst nightmare we can imagine, but to our “inner man” (that part of us that seeks peace on the inside), Jesus surmised His commandments as, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).*

John reiterated His words as, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).* Lastly, Paul testified from his own experience, *“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).*

PART I

**HEARING JESUS**

Chapter 1

**AS GOD, NOT CONTEXT**

The Bible is the true and perfect word of God. It is God's amazing revelation for us to come to believe in and know Him. The Bible was written by 40 people who were prophets, apostles, priests, kings, or common people. Although everything written by its authors was through the Spirit of God, there are many passages that record the direct voice of God. He spoke then, and is still speaking directly to us through those Old and New Testaments writings. In the New Testament, Jesus presents Himself to the world (and to us) as the Son of God – as God, Himself. He said, *“I and the Father are one”* (John 10:30) and *“...I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him”* (John 14:6-7).

Therefore, Jesus speaking directly to us equals God speaking directly to us. He is not a prophet of old, He is not an apostle of new, He is God, the First and the Last, The Beginning and the End, the same yesterday, today, and forever, Amen.

Today, however, the words of Jesus have been lost in the commentary and interpretation of people. His words cannot stand out to Christians with their

eternal authority and plan. They are simply too severe, do not fit with most doctrines of Evangelical Christianity, or are diluted out by many other teachings of the Bible. Consequently, the words of Jesus are routinely explained away or contextualized into some teaching or tradition that is conducive with the particular church, established Christian life styles, or for simplicities sake. This places believers at great risk when the foundations of society or life are shaken due to persecution or suffering in general. They will not be able to hear their Commander in Chief at the most critical times of their lives, rally to Him, and lift up His banner for the protection and salvation of themselves and others, and for the stifling of the enemy. They will simply become a victim of Satan's attacks rather than a conquering soldier of the King of kings.

Hearing Jesus must begin by recognizing that His direct voice to us is not a commentary or interpretation about Himself or about His judgments, promises, and blessings; He is telling us plainly what His judgments, promises, and blessings are and will be, regardless of what we think we know or understand. In terms of theology, Jesus has first priority in telling us Who God is. Only Jesus explains God because Jesus is God: *"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him"* (John 1:18). Theology has an order: from God the Father, to God the Son, to God the Holy Spirit, to us. Therefore, the words of His prophets of old and His apostles of new are placed into the context of what Jesus says; His words are not put into the context of theirs. Their words remain perfect and true but alter nothing of what He said while on earth – they only preface or append what He said. They are not of

lesser importance in the word of God, but their power and understanding are deflated or distorted if they are not placed under the context of Jesus' words and our obedience to them. Jesus' words are the foundation on which they recorded the word given to them. They supplement Him, He does not supplement them. The Apostle Paul said, *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Speaking to His future apostles He said, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:12-15, NKJV).

In speaking these things through the Holy Spirit after His ascension, He did not contradict or supplant His first words to us, but supplemented them.

Theology and doctrines based on the apostles teachings are fine things, but only ones that do not dilute, mitigate, weaken, offset, or thin out Jesus' direct words to us will remain for eternity. Any "precepts of men," "traditions of men," or "doctrines of demons" that detract from His words will be discarded by Him. They will have no place in Him. We will not stand before His judgment seat to explain how we followed the teachings of others, we will be judged according to what He has plainly told us and how we responded to it.

The same process that brought us to Him as our Savior on the cross: His words, judgment, conviction of sin, opportunity for repentance and forgiveness, and obedience to those things – is that same process that keeps Him as our God who rose from the dead to be the ruler of our lives: His words, judgment, conviction of sin, opportunity for repentance and forgiveness, and obedience to those things.

His testimony that “... *no one comes to the Father but through Me*” also means that we do not come to the Father through doctrines of people but through the testimony of everything that is Jesus. “*Then I (the Apostle John) fell at his feet to worship him (an angel of the Lord). But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’*” (Revelation 19:10).

If “the one whom Jesus loved” could make such a mistake, how much more are we prone to become fixated on the voice or work of others? How often do we stand gazing at the beautiful stones that surround the Chief Corner Stone, Jesus, rather than the Chief Corner Stone, Himself? Likewise, we do not put Jesus “in context” to the beautiful stones of our biblical knowledge; He puts us in the context of Himself and His words to us – the Chief Corner Stone. We can never be “biblically correct” until we are “Jesus correct.” And we can never be “Jesus correct” until our gazing at Him causes us to realize our own need of becoming a stone in that structure through doing what He said. The church has her place and Jesus has His. Jesus has, and will always have, the preeminence in all things. “*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”

Jesus provides an example of contextualizing His words at the end of His Sermon on the Mount when He speaks about suffering and persecution as a flood on the lives of believers. Speaking specifically to His disciples (Matthew 5:1-2) (and thus to us), Jesus ends His longest recorded discourse with a two-path scenario that each believer (each disciple) will ultimately face. Both scenarios include the calamity, *“The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house...”* (Matthew 7:25, 27). Persecution, itself, is a type of flood, consisting of the world’s particular beliefs that smash down onto the lives of believers. The flood is designed to wash the belief of Jesus (along with the believer) out of existence.

Jesus teaches us to prepare for that calamity by seeking to walk one of two paths, 1) *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock”* (Matthew 7:24), and 2) *“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand”* (Matthew 7:26). The message is clear about how we are to be ready for suffering or persecution – to act on or not act on (to do or not do) the instructions and commandments that He had just presented in His Sermon on the Mount.

Today, however, the rock/sand analogy is almost exclusively contextualized to how we hear and act on our understanding of God’s whole word, the Bible, rather than on Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. Compared to acting on His instructions and commandments within the Sermon on the Mount, hearing and acting upon the whole Bible becomes

immensely easier since there are many things within the entirety of the Bible that can be highlighted. We can pick and choose our daily “spiritual battles” or “doctrinal battles” from all kinds of teaching.

In comparison, the Sermon on the Mount contains many specific instructions and commandments for us to seek after and practice daily – and they are not easy to fulfill and they do not come naturally to anyone. Yet, only knowing about them places us on the sand, while doing them places us on the rock, ready for the flood of persecution or suffering.

In addition to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides many other such “two-path” scenarios throughout His teachings in the Gospels and Revelation. He is the master of contrast to teach us of what He expects from us.

For instance, Jesus’ description of Himself as the Chief Corner Stone comes with two options: *“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust”* (Luke 20:18). We will certainly be “broken to pieces” in this life when we first come to Jesus with our sin and later, as we continue to lay down other sin and follow Him through persecution or suffering. This is why He also says, *“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 16:25). Thus, it is far better to be broken to pieces than scattered like dust.

Another “two-path” outcome is given by the Righteous Judge at the end of Matthew where His judgements will separate the sheep and the goats by what they did or did not do to the least of those around them (and thus to Himself). *“...Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been*

*prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41) and “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).*

The righteous and the unrighteous are not separated to eternal life or punishment, respectively, based on what version of the sinner’s prayer they prayed or what doctrinal beliefs of a particular denomination they adhered to, but by how those things transformed their lives to testimonies that could be seen by the world around them.

A final example of “two-path” scenarios comes from His letters to the seven churches in Revelation Chapters 2-3. To six churches (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) He gave (and continues to give) rebuke, ultimatums, and potential rewards for repentance and endurance. Their paths were to repent or be removed. Only one church, Smyrna, had praise without any rebuke for their faithfulness, and their correct path was to be continued by further testing in prison so that even greater faithfulness and glorification of Jesus’ name could be demonstrated (Revelation 2:8-11).

Jesus is the Son of God. He and His Father are One. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. His Father (our Father) said, *“This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!”* (Mark 9:7).

Do we really “believe” Jesus when He gives us these two-path options? Paul tells us that everyone will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and many will say that they had faith in Him and believed in Him. But will He then ask why we did not believe His words to us? Do we actually believe what He said?

Paul also tells us that, *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*

(Romans 8:1). But are we fully “in Christ Jesus” where there truly is no condemnation, or are we fully in other theologies and doctrines where His words and pronouncements of judgments and condemnations have simply been removed from the picture?

Jesus is God; He is the perfect image of God. But has that image become a Picasso of denominational interpretation? Are we really hearing Jesus or have we contextualized Him into our biblical knowledge? Are we willing, rather, to be contextualized by Him and His words to us?

His words are more than teachings, they are life itself: “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8), and “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away*” (Matthew 24:35).

In hearing Jesus, in being contextualized by Him with the aliquot of faith He gives to each one of us, we will see that real life – full of peace, hope and love, power and purpose – are gained through Him and His words. He is the Living Water and the Bread of Life for us. We will fight the good fight, endure to the end, suffer with Him and thus be an heir with Him. His prophets foretold Him and His apostles exemplified Him. Now it is our turn.

Chapter 2

**THROUGH PERSECUTION AND SUFFERING**

Since the beginning our Heavenly Father has used suffering and persecution to mold His people. Through His prophet, Moses, He declared to the Israelites, *“You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, 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). Jesus said, *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:11-12) and, *“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...”* (John 15:20). Jesus said of Paul, *“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake”* (Acts 9:15-16). And, as mentioned, Paul strengthened *“the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through*

*many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22).

Furthermore, Paul considered persecution and suffering to be his obligation, stating to the Colossians, *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”* (Colossians 1:24). At one time, Jesus asked Paul why he was persecuting Him through the church, that is, through His body. Now Paul, as part of His body, considered it a requirement to supplement His Lord’s persecution. This *“filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”* continues to this day, all around the world.

Enduring suffering and/or persecution are as integral to believing in Jesus as the need to believe Him about being born again. Suffering is part of the process that bears fruit for Jesus. Jesus says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal”* (John 12:24-25). Paul says that we are, *“always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”* (2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

Bearing fruit together with the persecution and suffering that may accompany it is a requirement of the Christian life. The word “requirement” is used not as “earning” our way, but as “being” who we are as children of God. *“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot*

*produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit*” (Matthew 7:17-18). We are not children in name but children of purpose, children who are “about our Father’s business” (Luke 2:49 NKJV).

The Gospels are packed with Jesus’ teaching on the need to bear fruit, the ways to bear it, and the warnings of not bearing it (for instance, “*Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*” Matthew 7:19). Thus, the warning of not bearing fruit is a warning to examine who we are. If one does not see the necessity of bearing fruit through the good works He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), nor has any desire for it, then they must ask themselves if they are truly of Christ. It is easier, however, to simply heed His warnings; Jesus does not withhold a bad tree from humbling itself and asking to be made into a good tree that bears good fruit.

As Jesus points out in His plethora of commandments and instructions to us, fruit comes in all forms and quantities, from minuscule to grandiose. But all of it is done through Him and His power in us, and all of it brings glory to God. In the parable of the talents that was given to warn us of His return, those with five and two talents had an increase and pleased the Master, while the man with one talent did nothing and had no increase with his talent (Matthew 25:14-30). The Master reprimanded the man that even the smallest effort on his part (making a bank deposit) would have been enough. Consequently, the man was expelled into punishment. The message: *we have everything from Him that we need to do something – not nothing.*

It is not our fruit. It is the Lord’s. Our work is to simply present it. Jesus said, “*I am the vine, you are*

*the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).*

Persecution and suffering are required for our growth into the image of Jesus. It is for our discipline as children. Jesus, Himself, was perfect and without sin. Yet, He still had to learn obedience, and be “made perfect.” *“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:8-9).* Yet, the verse prior to these reveals the crying heart of a child to His Father, yet with perfect obedience to His Father. *“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety” (Hebrews 5:7).*

For many people, disciplining a child simply involves some form of punishment to ingrain right from wrong. But to our Heavenly Father, who is the only perfect Father, discipline is the process of refining His children into His image, His heart, His purpose, and His character. Everything in Him is right while everything outside of Him is wrong, and He disciplines us to mold us into His image: His character and His conduct.

His discipline, however, is hard training where some part may be punishment but the majority is the opportunity for us to be trained through it, to run His course with Him throughout our lives and finish well. In training, the fatigue will set in and the difficulty will steadily increase. But through that process our own image, heart, purpose, and character are steadily aligned more and more with His. Under His discipline,

we do not have a father who spanks us and then send us off alone to brood, but one who will hold and comfort us until we recover.

Under His discipline, we may be like an angry toddler in the arms of a father who firmly but gently holds us until the end of our thrashing leads to the start of our knowing what it means to “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10 NKJV) – which leads to a realization of His great strength that contains only warmth and love – which leads to our ability to hear His gentle instructions for how we can have more of His strength, warmth, and love.

Jesus does not set us upon some impossible course of action and then leave us to flounder, but He goes with us, towering over us like small children and always holding onto us through each difficulty.

Through the eyes of a willful mind, it may feel as though He is trying to push us into a pit and it can make us angry at God. After a time, however, we realize that He was not pushing but pulling; and that He was already in the pit, pulling us down closer to Him. And once recovered, we find that we are now less entangled by our willfulness and by love of the world around us, and that we are better equipped to go with Him to find others who are also in the pit. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ*” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5, NKJV).

Many Christians have long advocated the need to get back to “first-century Christianity.” The opportunity to achieve this goal, however, could be very close. First-century Christians were first and foremost persecuted Christians. They were unwelcome members of the public. They were considered fools and blights on society who would only infect others and disrupt or ruin their way of life. They were people with world-views and life-style choices considered to be the oppression of everything that was acceptable and good.

Thus, most of the accounts in the book of Acts must be read with an understanding that Christians were living under enormous stress – for their livelihoods and their lives. They lived in a continual state of vulnerability to homelessness, poverty, starvation, abandonment by family and friends, injury, and death. Add to that, the notion that one’s faith would cause their own family to suffer with them escalated the pressure beyond understanding.

How do we comprehend let alone cope with this kind of life (that may seem more like death than life)? As stated above, we must rally to the only perfect Theologian – our Lord, Jesus Christ. *“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him”* (John 1:18). He told us and showed us how to live through this life and to prepare ourselves, through His words, for suffering and persecution.

Because our lifetime is a blink of an eye compared to an eternal life with Him, He provides the wake-up call through suffering that we all need in order to hear Him. Otherwise, suffering and persecution are simply part of following Him. *“...what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!*

*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:11-12). Although suffering and persecution may seem like the loss of everything, it will actually be found as a negligible price to gain everything in Him.*

Prior to the onset of persecution and suffering, however, it is far better to listen to Him in times of peace, and allow ourselves to be contextualized by His words to us, not contextualize Him according to our own understanding. When the storms of this life do hit, He wants us in position for His protection, not deciding in which way to scamper for it.

Jesus teaches us how to live this life and walk each day through the difficulties and calamities that are common to all people. Only those who know Him in the smaller calamities will know Him in the greater ones. Those who do not know Him this way will only ask, “Where is God?” in the greater calamities. They never knew where He was before. This, in part, lies within the verse, “*And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN.’ This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:26-27). Jesus and His words, together with our adherence to them, is the only rock on which we will not be shaken.*

### Chapter 3

## **BY BECOMING LIKE A CHILD**

To hear Jesus in the midst of suffering and persecution, we must first learn to become like children. *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’”* (Matthew 18:1-4).

In answer to the disciples’ question, Jesus specifically calls a child over to Himself and presents the child as a role model to them. Jesus then establishes two requirements for entering His kingdom: to be “converted,” and to “become like children.” Saying a sinner’s prayer is certainly the first step in conversion, but He also establishes a process to enter the kingdom of heaven by His commandment to, *“become like children.”* In addition, greatness upon entering will be found in the process of humbling oneself during their life as a child. Thus, to mature as a Christian is to grow back into childlikeness.

These types of expectations (or conditions) for entering His kingdom, and for having status there, are

common throughout His words to us. Using a simple Bible word search, instructions and conditions on how one will “enter the kingdom” of God are given 16 times in the New Testament. Likewise, instructions and conditions of “inheriting” the kingdom of God are presented 15 times throughout the New Testament. These searches do not include the numerous illustrations and analogies about the character and conduct of those who would call themselves “Christian.”

Jesus’ expectations and conditions, however, are not any more burdensome or difficult than our initial conversion where a sinner’s prayer of humility, brokenness, forgiveness, and love first came to our soul at our first encounter with Jesus on the cross. The same beauty of humility, brokenness, forgiveness, and love simply continues in following Jesus’ words for us to live by. The same healing, peace, and joy found at the cross is the same healing, peace, and joy found when we hear and obey His expectations and conditions. Birth (conversion) without thriving afterwards (becoming like children) leads to death. Jesus’ words show us the way out of the newborn-intensive-care unit.

In the same passage of Matthew, Jesus tells us that children and the child-like are a standard by which He will judge adults, *“And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe*

*to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!* (Matthew 18:5-7).

Today, children's media and programming is saturated with everything that is not of God, no matter how innocent it may seem. Through it they gain a virtual worshipping and serving of "*the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever*" (Romans 1:25); through it they come to understand that almost all authority over them either stifles their strengths and creativity, or that it should cater to their every whim; and through it they learn of their independence, authority, and power in this life, rather than a dependence on the authority and power of God. If this is the stumbling block of children's media, what is adult media to the child-like adults? "*Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!*"

Scripture exalts those who become the child-like of Jesus through their dependence, poverty, disabilities, lack of education, and marginalization. "*At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight'*" (Luke 10:21).

In addition, Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" "*Blessed are those who mourn,*" "*Blessed are the gentle,*" "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*" "*Blessed are the merciful,*" "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" and, "*Blessed are the peacemakers*" (Matthew 5:3-9).

Paul says, "*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world..., and God has chosen the weak things of the world...; and the base things of the world*

*and the things which are despised God has chosen,...*” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28, NKJV), and “*remember the poor – the very thing I also was eager to do*” (Galatians 2:10).

And James says, “*But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position*” and “*...did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*” (James 1:9, 2:5).

All of these verses have been perfectly captured in the lyrics, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world” and reflects all children of the world, the disabled and marginalized who are child-like adults, and those who “*become like children*” through following Jesus.

But how does one *become like a child* as Jesus said? First, a baby or child is completely dependent on its parents for food, shelter, health, protection, affection, and love. Thus, the “process” of becoming a child of God will continually increase our need to become more supported and nurtured by our Heavenly Father the longer we are Christians, and regardless of our age, income, education, or social standing.

In contrast to our natural parents where, in time, we become more independent in these things, with our Heavenly Father we become more dependent on Him for these things. A natural child knows that it has nothing and needs everything from their parents, while a spiritual child grows to learn that it really has nothing, but needs everything from their Heavenly Father. “*Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’*” (Matthew 6:31). “*But seek first His kingdom and His*

*righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).*

Concerning how they view the world around them, a natural child assumes that other children are likewise provided for by their parents, while a spiritual child must learn that their Heavenly Father is the parent Who provides for everyone else in the world. “...*nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25).* Our outlook on believers and non-believers all over the world, regardless of the religious or political system that they are under, must be seen the same way.

Aside from physical needs, a child also yearns for attention and affirmation from their parents. They simply want their parent’s companionship. Whether it is having parents watch their new skills, getting their approval for something, helping in their parent’s work, or just playing near them, Children desire that intimacy. Similarly, we must learn to desire that same closeness with our Heavenly Father; where we want to show Him what we are doing, seek His approval, help alongside Him, and even take our rest with and through Him – the same way a child curls up with a parent to read a book. Through hearing and doing what His Son, Jesus, has told us, we can find that same child-like peace, simplicity, and wonderment in our Heavenly Father. In doing so, we regain the perfect childhood that everyone wishes for, both now and eternally.

Finally, children are imitators of good and evil or right and wrong, rather than distinguishers of it. They absorb and blend everything that is offered to them in word and deed by family, friends, and the media, and then express it through their own

personalities. All children, and all who were once children, learn the ways of the world through everyone they encounter in the world. Only as we grow up do our behaviors become more solidified and justified in our own eyes so that we become distinguishers, rather than imitators, of behavior in others. Only in growing up do we gain wisdom to become those “*knowing good and evil*” (Genesis 3:5).

No one is exempt from this process. Unfortunately, every role model a person has or has had in their lives comes under the verses, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), “*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*” (Romans 7:24), “*...whatever is not from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23), and “*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). There is literally no good except that which comes from, or is about God.

Even Jesus said, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone*” (Luke 18:19). Although He was perfect, Jesus always deferred what He said and did as originating from His Heavenly Father, thereby giving the credit and glory to Him. Likewise, our Heavenly Father is the only perfect parent and we must defer to Him so that we can be *born again* in order to be *raised again*, under the perfect instruction and example He gave us through His Son.

Therefore, Jesus’ requirement for us to “become like children” means learning to imitate the good of our Heavenly Father – apart from learning to distinguish between good and evil. Like a child, love “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...*” (1 Corinthians

13:4-8). As the only perfect spiritual adult, Jesus will take care of the distinguishing part. His imitation of the Heavenly Father was perfect and His judgments are therefore solid and just. *“Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God”* (1 Corinthians 4:5).

At spiritual rebirth, we become as innocent and naïve as any natural baby ready to be imprinted anew with the character and purpose of God which was completely exemplified and spoken of through His Son, Jesus.

But as babies, we are also vulnerable and subject to anything and everything not of Jesus. If a newborn Christian's attention is continually directed to His Lord and His voice, they will become imitators of Him; they will learn and practice how to express His fruit of humility, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, the bearing of each other's burdens, entering the darkness with His light, and laying down their lives for Him and their neighbor.

If, however, one is imprinted with a conglomerate of church-specific doctrines and traditions rather than Jesus-specific doctrines and ways, than they will be imitators of those things, rather than imitators of Jesus. Non-Jesus imitations may include passive endorsements of this world's values and practices, acquiring a “bushel basket” mentality (Matthew 5:15) that isolates congregants from being lights to the world around them, or indignation and malice about other churches. *“Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also*

*please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 10:32-11:1).

In "knowing the Bible" and its interpreted doctrine, it is easy to become distinguishers of good and evil "doctrine" rather than imitators of God through Jesus. Knowing the Bible and doing what Jesus said are two different things. Although there is a lot to "know" in the Bible, it can be done with complete disregard for what Jesus said to "do." Rather, seeking to do what Jesus said will then lead to knowledge.

Jesus' expectation of us to, "Become like children," also means to hear Him like a child. "...*No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6) also means that no one comprehends the written word of God except through first hearing and obeying the words of Jesus. Biblical knowledge without submission to all that Jesus said is another form of "*always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth*" (2 Timothy 3:7). Jesus told Pilate that, "*Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*" (John 18:37). And Paul again answers Pilate's question of "what is truth" with, "*if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus*" (Ephesians 4:21). Knowledge of God follows obedience to Jesus. Knowing God follows faith in Jesus; "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).

As true children of God, we must first *hear* and *obey* Jesus before we can *know* the Bible. Trying to do the opposite is like putting the cart before the horse, shooting an arrow backwards, or polishing a yoke rather than putting it to use. Jesus, however, is God. His

words pull the cart, represent the arrowhead, and yoke us together with Him as He plows His righteousness and eternal life through the dirt and manure of Satan's temporary domain.

It is possible to believe in the principles of the cross without believing the One who was hung on it – and that makes the cross empty and void. Only through obedience to His words will He pull both us and others through this life, shoot the arrow through the darkest evil in this world (rather than through us), and make His yoke the only real source of security and purpose in our lives (in contrast to the exhausting yokes of careers, medical insurance, college funds, and retirement plans). In addition, we will subsequently understand how the cart actually works to support and carry us and others, appreciate the perfection of the arrow shaft and its feathers, and accept the beauty, complexity, and bondage of the yoke. His words are the only place where we will *find* rest for our souls and it is the only place we can build upon the rock and not the sand.

Chapter 4

**BY SEEING LIKE A CHILD**

There is a plethora of “knowledge” to be gained from the written word of God and it is all perfect and wonderful. But apart from Jesus’ words, Biblical knowledge can be continuously whittled down or inflated so that any tangible, denominationally-approved scripture can be used to say that one knows God.

And with a good knowledge of any number of “essential” biblical doctrines we can begin to feel comfortable with our faith and our lives. And with that comfort we fall into Jesus’ warning, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”* (Revelation 3:17).

Jesus, however, said many things that do not fit with basic doctrine and one has to either not take His teachings at face-value or defer to some contextual interpretation of them. For instance, Jesus said, *“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions”* (Matthew 6:14-15), which He later followed up with the *Parable of the Unforgiving*

*Servant* in Matthew 18 to show a requirement that we forgive others. He concluded that parable with, “*Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.’ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart*” (Matthew 18:32-35). Thus, in scripture, we have unconditional forgiveness of our debt to God at the cross with the conditional requirement for us to extend unconditional mercy to others.

Here lies the difference between a pursuit of “knowledge” and the pursuit of “becoming like children,” between knowledge and belief in Jesus. Knowledge must accept one teaching and ignore the other, but those who become like children can simply believe and obey all that Jesus did and said, regardless of an understanding in how it all fits together. Will we know eternal life only through believing Jesus’ propitiation of sins on the cross, or will we know eternal life through believing Jesus – everything He said or did, including His propitiation of sins on the cross? “*...that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

Thus, there is an *order* of understanding through obedience to Jesus where, “*...Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies*” (1 Corinthians 8:1). In Jesus’ commandment to forgive, the obedience of love will bring the wonderful relief and healing that occurs through forgiveness of others, and having humbled ourselves in this we will then understand more

acutely what Jesus' humility and forgiveness at the cross really meant for us and the whole world. His commandments and our obedience creates a circle of ever-increasing love and eternal life both inside and outside of ourselves. The pursuit of knowledge does not do this.

“Becoming like children” also requires that we see like children. To the Pharisees, “*Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, “We see,” your sin remains”*” (John 9:41). In contrast, what do children “see?” What do children “understand” about the complexities of life? Do they understand how the behavior of their parents, family, friends, and media tie in within the world’s behavior and complications, or how it relates to the past, present, and future of all creation? Of course not. Those things are not even questions, or are at best mysteries that slowly reveal themselves as they grow up and experience it for themselves.

In the same way, the Pharisees who accused Jesus did not consider themselves like children who humbly read His word in order to fulfill His ways and glorify Him, but rather they considered themselves as adults who were “guardians” of the knowledge of God’s word and His ways – they were people who could tell Jesus to His face, “we know this” and “we know that.” Although they had knowledge as adults, they did not have the hearts of children which could understand the spirit of God’s law. Thus, they did not know Who it was that they were talking to.

If history repeats itself, then today we have the same situation in the church which boasts of its biblical knowledge but cannot hear what Jesus said concerning

eternal life, bearing fruit in His kingdom, and how the two are interrelated.

In a general sense, the Bible is our owner's manual for the amplification of God's love and kingdom in our lives that goes out to the world. Jesus' words and commandments gives us the plain instructions on how to plug in, turn on, and use the system, while portions of the remaining New Testament provide "technical specificities" about the amplification system – "*...in which are some things hard to understand*" (2 Peter 3:16).

Much of the church, however, has become infatuated with knowledge of the technical specificities rather than putting the system to use. Having our sins forgiven at the cross certainly plugs the system in, but hearing and obeying Jesus is what turns the system on and plays it throughout our lives. Rather than amplifiers of God's love and Jesus ways, we have become amplifiers of the technical mysteries about predestination and free will, what spiritual gifts are invalid or valid, what happens in the end times, the resurrection of ourselves and the judgment of others, and the false prophecies proclaimed by every other church but our own.

Again, however, do we "see" like children how the requirement of God to forgive others so that He will forgive our sins fits with forgiveness at the cross? Do we understand the requirement to extend mercy in order to receive mercy from God (Matthew 5:7)? Is there an inkling of truth about us in what Jesus said, "*But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry*" (Luke 6:24-25)? What about His instructions of who to invite for dinner parties, who

to greet, and how much eternal life really costs us? What about His rewards to us for following His word and His judgments in not following? What about, *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:27)?

His plethora of commandments and instructions have become moot points in churches saturated by unlimited love and grace, churches that declare all mysteries and truth, and churches that know the principles of the cross without knowing the requirement to carry one. Many have indeed fulfilled Jesus words of, *“but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains”* and, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”* (Revelation 3:17).

But a perceived knowledge of God can change to the love of God in a second. To see like children, we must only decide to hear His voice, believe every word, and place ourselves within its context. We must take every word to ourselves at face value – whether its conditions for His forgiveness of sins, warnings to the Pharisees and religious rulers of His day, judgments of continuing in sin, details in loving Him and our neighbors, laying down our lives for Him, and who it is that He will consider great in His kingdom – regardless of our understanding on how it all fits together with His mysteries and His past, present, and future will. In this way we really see Jesus as others did while He was on earth, *“for all the people were hanging on to every word He said”* (Luke 19:48).

We must become blind again, so that we can both see Him and see through His eyes. We must humble ourselves under His judgment now, rather than

be humbled by it later. We must hear the smallest of His words and say that we will do them in the smallest ways. We must know that in doing them we find both eternal life and eternal rewards. His words and work in us are eternal life because *He* is life. Jesus is God.

When we take Jesus at His word and admit that we “don’t see,” then the concepts of sin, fear, judgement, hope, love, and eternity will take on whole new meanings. Also, the way we see ourselves, other Christians, non-believers, our Lord and Savior, and our Heavenly Father will likewise change. We will become His children and begin to see as His children. We will find the lost innocence and peace of childhood at whatever age we are. We will know the meekness of God, and the definition of love; that *“love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not Acts unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Hearing and obeying Jesus is the only thing that will allow us to extend the kindness of God to our enemies in the face of persecution and suffering.

In addition, we will understand that the meekness God requires of us is only for a season. Jesus was sent the first time, not as a judge, but as a Savior from God’s judgment – as the extension of His mercy. Likewise, this is our role – to be His body that points others to Him in the way He told us to. We are His body that still lays down its life in love for both the Heavenly Father and the world.

The second time He returns, however, He will judge everyone, both believers and unbelievers by all of the things that He told us the first time – by “*every careless word*” (Matthew 12:36) and by “*his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10, Matthew 16:27, Romans 2:6, Revelation 2:23, 20:12, 13, 22:12). And the second time He comes those who are “in Christ,” according to how Christ defines being in Christ, will also be rewarded by Him to reign with Him. The meekness and judgment of Christ are not contradictions, but His comprehensive character – the beginning and the end.

In seeing like children, we will understand that no matter how much the world hates His declarations of what is right (and His body who declares it), there can be no safer place for a child of God than to be in the will and purpose of their Heavenly Father. A quote from God’s wonderful servant in the book, *The Hiding Place* says, “There are no ‘ifs’ in God’s world. And no places that are safer than other places. The center of His will is our only safety!”<sup>1</sup> And Jesus declares His protection and justice for His children, “*but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea*”... “*See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven*”... “*So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish*” (Matthew

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<sup>1</sup> Corrie Ten Boom and Elizabeth and John Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. (Chosen, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006).

18:6, 10, 14). Furthermore, He told His children in Jerusalem, “...*How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...*” (Matthew 23:37). He loves children and He loves us as children.

Suffering and persecution are only for an hour so that, within their limited time, myriads of souls can be ripened and harvested into the kingdom of God. As small children under persecution or suffering, it may seem that we are standing in the lion’s den, in the middle of a raging ocean filled with sin, evil, and hostility seeking to devour us. But standing in the will of God, by hearing and doing what He has told us, we cannot be in a more secure place.

We have read Bible story after Bible story about it, read about Christian heroes and Christian martyrs, rejoiced in their perseverance and the fruit it bore. But most of us have likely never experienced that kind of hostility. Like them, however, we can stand firm as a small cub stands next to the roaring Lion of Judah and know that He will deliver us. Not only will He deliver us but He will reap a wonderful harvest through us at the same time, capturing many other souls who hear and see our witness. Within His kingdom, we have our bit, our very little bit to do in the same amazing process that He has been using for over 2000 years.

Chapter 5

**THROUGH THE FEAR OF GOD**

Everyone will have fear in the face of persecution and suffering. But this, of course, is fear of the world. We often hear the teaching that the phrase “do not be afraid” occurs 365 times in the Bible, once for every day of the year. Jesus, however, taught a little more on the subject of fear with, *“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”* (Luke 12:4-5).

We seldom, if at all, hear about how we should fear our Heavenly Father in the way Jesus told us to. At best, we hear about the non-threatening “healthy” or “reverent” fear of God and even that is often discounted.

It is clear that Jesus is specifically addressing His disciples in this teaching, *“...He began saying to His disciples first of all,...”* Luke 12:1. Thus, our Lord is not warning the world but those who wish to follow Him, and to them He also addresses as His friends. Again, to them, and thus to us, He says, *“fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”*

Likewise, many other passages in the New Testament contain severe warnings to Christians about the fear of God, and about the consequences of not listening to what He is telling us. Therefore, real, abject fear of our Heavenly Father is what is required, and this contrasts greatly with the “healthy respect” or “reverent fear” taught today.

This abject fear of God, however, is an integral part of our Christian lives, and there is nothing wrong and everything right about it. It may be horrible and miserable to our flesh (which always seeks to exalt itself), but it is a humbling, servant-worthy fear that comes from our spirit, and it will not incapacitate or disable us. Rather, through the fear of God, our spirits, purpose, and power will thrive in the Spirit, purpose, and power of His Son.

The fear of God has a purpose and season in our growth as His children. As growing children, fear of our Heavenly Father goads us into listening to and obeying what He says (through His Son) to do. His words are life. Everything outside of His word is not a partial or different kind of life that He concedes to. His words are life and outside of them is death. It is that simple and that important.

As Christians we are at liberty to try and live our lives with Him in the background, or to have His life lived through us while we, ourselves, are in the background. The latter will bear fruit while the former will not.

Jesus said both, “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples*” (John 15:8), and “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” (Luke 6:46). Each Christian is called to do what Jesus says and to

bear fruit. He allows us time to figure out what it means to fear Him and do what He says.

The goal, however, is to hear His call to work along-side Him as fishers of souls or as farmers of His fields, in our own child-like ways under His complete supervision and protection, to discover the narrow way to eternity. As we work next to Him as His children we will grow up in Him so that we will be more and more of His same mind and purpose – His image. In this way we will be “like Him.” *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

The teaching of a Christian’s entitlement to the kingdom of God and all its glory has completely saturated the church, but according to the many conditions of Jesus, not everyone will have the crown of life (*“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,”* Revelation 2:10), not everyone will reign with Him (*“and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him,”* Romans 8:17), not everyone will hear, *“well done good and faithful servant”* (see Matthew 25:14-30), and *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter”* (Matthew 7:21).

It is vital (it is life), that we fear God and contextualize ourselves under the words of our Lord, regardless of our need for knowledge, understanding, and simplification of His ways, and humble ourselves to obey His commands and seek His Father’s will. The fear of God is not hard, disabling, stifling, or belittling. It is the opposite – in humbling ourselves, His

commandments are not burdensome, we find healing and strength through obedience, we become free to serve as the person He created us to be, and we are exalted in His embrace and fellowship.

Through the fear of God we will more deeply learn of God's love for us and how to love God back. Through the fear of God we will learn how to love our neighbors and how it is that God loves us back through them.

The love and fear of God are not contradictory but comprehensive; one supplements the other. They are proportional to each other, where the numerator is love and the denominator is fear. The fear of God to obey His Son will lead us into a deeper understanding of all He has done for us, and love will increase while fear decreases.

John's complete passage of fear and perfect love says this beautifully as, "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also*" (1 John 4:18-21). If we hate our brother, or do not love according to how Jesus commanded, do we fear God, repent, and love or do we say "God is love and He loves me unconditionally?" Those in the latter case are liars.

John's discussion on fear and the perfect love of God comes just after His discussion of how to perfect the love of God in ourselves by hearing and obeying Jesus. "*The one who says, 'I have come to*

*know Him, ' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:4-6).*

Do we keep the words of Jesus? For instance, do we think of someone as stupid and believe His words, "...and whoever says, 'You fool, ' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matthew 5:22), or do we say, "God is love and He loves me unconditionally?" Do we believe Jesus' words that, "*blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy?*" Do we fear God's conditions in this statement (and seek out the plethora of opportunities for mercy that surround us), or do we say "God is love and He loves me unconditionally?" We can only say, "*I have come to know Him,*" when we see His commandments fulfilled in us – otherwise we are...

In the above passage, "*By this we know that we are in Him...*" John addresses how we are to know that we belong to Jesus, that we are God's children, and how we can recognize that eternal security. John does not present popular church doctrine, but says, "*the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*" This echoes Jesus' words, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*"

We cannot, from ourselves, bear the fruit that He wants us to bear; but He can, and we have the Holy Spirit Who does. Our *hearing* and *obeying* Jesus each day opens the door that bears fruit. "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he*

*bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). It is a daily miracle to see Him live from within us, and then to be the recipients of the blessings that come from it.

Thus, the fear of God brings our attention to His Son’s commandments. Ignoring them is as good as death, but success or failure in them always brings victory because, through them, we see more sharply His great love for us, for the world, and we are humbled as children by them. The *fear* of God produces the *love* to know Him. *“By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world”* (1 John 4:17).

The promises of blessing and warnings of wrath by God are not contradictions, but the completeness of being in His Son, Jesus. The fear and love of God intertwine to bring us ever closer to perfect love. If we really believe the warnings of Jesus, we quickly see that the fear of God is not meant to work alone for our misery, but is part of a process that brings us closer to Him and His blessings.

Although it would be wonderful to have perfect love of God with no fear, there is only One Person who has achieved that. He alone fulfilled God’s commandment to *“LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH”* (Mark 12:30), and the result was perfect love with no fear of God.

The price of that love for each of us, however, is the same as it was for Jesus. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went*

*and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matthew 13:45-46, NKJV). Yet, the one who pursues it finds that the price gets smaller as the Lord Jesus becomes closer.

In moments of temptation or trial the fear of God is a wonderfully motivating factor. Fear allows us to remember and act on Jesus’ commandments: to humble ourselves, to flee temptation, to not covet, to serve others and not ourselves, to offer compassion rather than indignation, to forgive, to not return evil for evil, and to love our enemies.

When temptation, fear, frustration, or anger arises toward those in the world, the fear of God is the first step that will supplant it with the love and power of God to avoid sin and to perform His righteousness of love (e.g. good works).

As the children of God, our major effort is that of a “light” switch that must be thrown open or kept open via 1) the fear of disobedience, 2) the love of obedience, or 3) a mixture of the two. In those moments, our witness is made to others and we and anyone else involved are drawn closer to the Lord. His love and grace are meant to flow through us to others, not stop within us. If they stop within us, they are as good as “buried” or “covered” and Jesus has described that problem (Matthew 5:15). Humbling ourselves in confession to God and our neighbor, however, will re-establish His flow of love.

Everyone has fear built into their constitution. A well-issued fear of God, however, will keep the fear of this world at bay. It is a transfer of fear from one ruler, who hands out only death under a false promise of life from “self,” to the true Ruler, Who offers real life through death to “self.”

Persecution and suffering provide the highest platform on which to perfect our love for God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. At those times, the fear of the Lord and the fear of the world are right before us. The writer of Hebrews gives a complete picture of this, *“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN.’ This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain”* (Hebrews 12:26-27).

So how do we not be shaken by His shaking? The answer is by allowing ourselves to be shaken beforehand by the fear of the Lord and obedience to His word that leads to love of the Lord and obedience to His word. In this way, the writer of Hebrews flanks the verses above with the answers of 1) fear, *“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven”* (Hebrews 12:25), and 2) love, *“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe”* (Hebrews 12:28). The words of Jesus teach us what an *“acceptable service with reverence and awe”* mean. Fear and love work to His perfection in us and glory to Him.

The fear of God brings great hope, joy, and abundant life even in suffering and persecution. It is a real life of hope in the face of death. But well before the point of death, the fear of God is the stepping stone that lifts us into the sight of His perfect love for us and

our perfect love of Him. The stepping stone of fear will eventually be gone and perfect love will envelop. *“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full”* (John 15:11). *“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God”* (1 Peter 4:1-2, NKJV); and *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works”* (Matthew 16:25-27, NKJV).

Chapter 6

**THROUGH HIS JUDGMENTS**

Today the names of Jesus have changed from:

*One Teacher* to contributing author

The *Word of life* to a preface on various doctrinal beliefs

The *Chief Cornerstone* to a flagstone on which to wipe our sins

*Captain of our Salvation* to an Ensign who tidies up our sins

The *Image of God* to a Picasso of biblical knowledge

The *Image of God* to our image

*Eternal Judge* to the court clerk who hands out the pardons

*Eternal Judge* to a non-judgmental prophet

The great *I AM* distorted into who “We Are”

His words, however, will never pass away and He is entitled by His Father to fulfill everything He said. Jesus’ warnings always concern His future judgments to “*REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.*” They are righteous warnings and righteous judgments. Jesus is God. He is the Living God and we must listen to Him as if every word were for us, not others.

His warnings about impending judgments, however, are seldom taught today, but they are easily identified in the gospels and concern our character and conduct on such things as mercy, forgiveness, adultery with our eyes, considering someone a fool, showing off, not confessing Him before others, misusing His blessings, and humbling ourselves. These are just a few examples that saturate the New Testament.

So why are all His commandments and warnings not just another version of the Old Testament law? Why are they all not just a different burden of the law that no one can fulfill? The answer is based on our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through faith. It is faith that begins in His death on the cross for our sins, and faith that continues in His resurrected life in and through us. Faith begins our life through His death, and faith continues His life through our death to self. Belief in only the doctrine of propitiation of sin is not life; knowledge of the Bible is not life; *He*, Himself, is life – the way, the truth, and the life. Belief in Him is life, “...*that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

His life and our lives, however, can be two different things where we either put ourselves in Jesus’ life or we put Him in ours. When we believe Jesus’ words (that include His blessings together with His warnings and judgments) we put ourselves in His life and we lose our lives to gain His.

Conversely, it is possible to try and add Him to our lives as a type of spiritual convenience, a clean-up for sin, a get-out-of-jail for free card. We can provide enough “spiritual-correctness” by church attendance, politeness, language modification, knowledgeable discussions, prayer requests, and judgmental holiness

but still retain covetousness, self-seeking lives in career, family, and the hopes and dreams of a temporal future. In seeking our own lives, we effectively make Jesus a supplement for our lives instead of us becoming a supplement to His.

This self-serving faith is readily found in common analogies that demonstrate what faith in Jesus is like. Most have heard the story of a man with a wheelbarrow going across a tightrope over Niagara Falls. Although he does this numerous times with no problem, real faith in what he is doing comes only when we, ourselves, get in the wheelbarrow so He can push us across. In the analogy, Jesus is the man with the wheelbarrow and the tightrope and chasm are the difficult circumstances of our lives that He can carry us across. He is in control of both the wheelbarrow and the tightrope walk and He never fails.

Another analogy is the footprints in the sand; where we walk with Jesus through this life and only afterwards look back to see that two sets of prints were visible when He walked along side of us, but only one set of prints were visible during the difficult times because He carried us. The message of these analogies is that Jesus walks with or carries us throughout this life and we can have faith that He is there.

Unfortunately, both comparisons of faith utilize the wrong settings. The tightrope over the chasm and the footprints along the shoreline represent *our* paths, not *God's* path. Faith is misplaced in having Jesus walk with or carry us through our lives. He came to walk before us through *His* life, not carry us through *our* lives. Real life comes through His life, not in Him helping us with ours.

The real chasm in the above analogy is actually a spiritual battlefield of death that Jesus engages through us. Everyone, perceiving it or not, lives in that battlefield. He doesn't walk over it, but right down through it; bringing His light into the darkness and life through His death. He is the mega-ton tank that guides us along the paths of righteousness which meander through the valley of the shadow of death; and we walk safely behind Him. His rod and staff instruct us how to stay on the path and pull us back in line if we diverge (Psalm 23:3-4). Disregarding His warnings and judgments exposes us like "sitting ducks."

Likewise, the shoreline of the footsteps analogy is not made of sand but is a rock outcrop that hovers over the abyss of a sea of death from where He is the only coast guard of the world through us. If we could see our footprints on the rock, we would not see two sets but one set where ours are hidden within His as we followed Him. Two sets would only be seen during the times we diverged from Him.

As Christians of today we are like the disciples in the boat during the storm (our storms being the smallest and largest problems of life) trying to wake up Jesus by crying, "*Master, Master, we are perishing!*" (Luke 8:24). He saved them but admonished them asking, "*Where is your faith*" (Luke 8:25). He wants us to know what the 70 disciples would later know, "*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name*" (Luke 10:17).

Similarly, the Christian life is not about how to be continually rescued while in the boat but the ministry to the world that the boat takes us to. That journey, however, still has to go through the same storms common to all people. When we are afraid of

the sea and worried about the boat, we are not looking at and obeying His commandments and warnings. The crashing, life-threatening sea *is* our ministry and His words *are* the boat in which we perform it. He still has power over the sea and provides continual life through the boat. His commandments and judgments are life, not religion, and we believe them with a living faith.

So why do we disregard the Lord's impending judgments of us? If, for example, He says that we must be merciful to receive His mercy, or if He says that it is better to pluck out our eye or cut off our hand rather than have the whole body cast into hell because of adultery, should we remove these judgments so that His words to us are easier to understand or accept? Or rather, if we believe His judgments to be justified for us, is His mercy not that much more required? Are we not that much more forgiven? Is His blood not that much more precious? Are we not that much more humbled before Him?

Disbelieving or believing His judgments is the difference within our hearts that says, "I'm a victor in Christ" or "Christ is Victor and I'm in Him." His judgments brought us to His cross and His judgments continually bring us back to Him. It becomes the difference in "one who is forgiven little, loves little" or "one who is forgiven much, loves much" (Luke 7:47).

It is to acknowledge again that we are the tax gatherer who "*...was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'*" (Luke 18:13).

Finally, it is a resignation to the Lord as Peter answered, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life'*" (John 6:68). Believing that He will judge us according to His words brings about true

humility, repentance, and subsequent obedience, “...for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

He became *The Way* that delivered us from our former lives and His truth becomes *The Life* that keeps us as legitimate, rather than illegitimate, children. Judas was an example of an illegitimate child, the forerunning “son of perdition” that would typify many to come. “*Jesus answered them, ‘Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?’*” (John 6:70).

For over three years, Judas walked up and down the length of Israel with Jesus and the disciples, left behind his former life, ministered food to the 5000 and 7000, and went to the towns and villages to preach the good news. Yet he was considered a devil or a tare among the wheat. Judas was the first fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that, “*Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’*” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Judas did not wrestle with *unbelief*, as did the rest of the disciples, but *disbelief* that climaxed in wanting to see Jesus stopped and harmed. During those three years, Judas put Jesus in the context of who he wanted Him to be, rather than putting himself into the context of who Jesus wanted him to be. For three years Judas tried to make the *Image of God*, Jesus, into his own image.

The mistakes of the other disciples’ unbelief in following Jesus eventually grew into belief as they

could not deny what they experienced, while the mistakes of Judas' disbelief while following Jesus eventually grew into hate and bitterness toward God (Jesus) because those same experiences were a torment to his heart.

The Prophet Jonah's spiritual struggle in understanding God and His dealings with Nineveh is another example like that of the disciples. It also reflects the same differences between belief and disbelief of God's ways, and the possible conclusions of Jonah's story are purposefully left for each of us to fulfill. Each of us is in the same battle, under the same accountability to our Lord, and we must each humble ourselves before Him to repent of any disbelief in order to start wrestling with Him in belief and unbelief.

It is interesting to note that although Jesus knew Judas as a devil, He did not hinder or remove him from the group. In fact, He even put him in charge of the money box (John 12:6). In the same spirit, He also gave us the parable of tares growing among the wheat, *"And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn'"* (Matthew 13:28-30). Jesus knows that the immediate judgment and animosity required to remove the tares would damage the surrounding wheat, and besides, even the tares are given time to repent.

This is the spirit by which we are to view ourselves and all who call themselves Christian. No

one knows the heart, faith, and future of others except our Lord. We can still entrust the Judases of the world with the money box, and we can pray for, minister to, and disciple the tares.

In the same way, Jesus showed us the diversity of His children that would exist in Him, and He told us how to view other people's ministries who are different from ours, "*Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us. But Jesus said to him, 'Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you'*" (Luke 9:49-50).

The overwhelming spirit of indignation and judgment that seems to permeate evangelical Christianity (and Protest-Ants in general) against anyone else who says that they are of Jesus must be kept in check, and instead replaced with "*faith working through love*" (Galatians 5:6), in both word and deed, for Him. He is the only sorter of His assorted. "*The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins*" (1 Peter 4:7-8).

In contrast to Judas, it is far better to be like Peter, who said and made many mistakes, recovering each time to ultimately lay down his life for the Lord. Peter, in his mistakes of *unbelief*, had nowhere to go except back to Jesus, while Judas, in his mistakes of *disbelief* had nowhere to go except away from Jesus. Unlike Judas, Peter proved himself to be an "overcomer" in the way that Jesus teaches us.

Jesus commandments, warnings, and judgments are the standards designed to make us "overcomers." Revelation states, "*And they overcame*

*him (the Devil) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death”* (Revelation 12:11). According to this verse, there are three requirements for overcoming: 1) the propitiation of sins – Jesus’ blood that continues to forgive and wash our sins away, 2) our witness – our confession of Jesus and testimony of Him, and 3) that we do not love our lives in this world, even when faced with death.

Evangelicals, of course, have an abundance of teaching on the first criteria – to have the blood of Jesus wash away our sins and this is the first and continual requirement (1 John 1:9) of being a disciple.

The second criterion is generally taught as evangelism. It is noteworthy, however, that the “word of their testimony” is not necessarily referring to evangelism. Our testimony is “our story” or “our witness,” short or long, of what Jesus has done for each of us. In comparison, evangelism may or may not include that story. In part of His great commission, Jesus calls His disciples to be His “witnesses;” that is, to tell their story or testify of Him, “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

In contrast, evangelists have a gift to preach the propitiation of sins through Jesus which can be woven together with their witness of what Jesus has done for them. The gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11) is given to some disciples, while the commandment to witness is given to all disciples. A witness can “confess” Jesus anywhere, in any amount of time, to anyone they meet. Evangelism, however, must have the ability and time to

outline God's plan for the world, sin and its consequences, His plan of redemption, a sinner's prayer, and our life as His children. This is excellent, as the Lord provides those opportunities, but one should not negate their witness if they don't have the opportunity or ability for evangelism.

Jesus even spoke of being a witness in regards to our judgment, *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32-33, NKJV). It is therefore vital to not defer our confession of Him to others if the opportunity for a full-gospel evangelistic encounter is not available.

This is particularly important these days when the world has closed its ears to Jesus and will not take the time to listen, and when encountering persecution and suffering where the resources of time and ability are likewise diminished.

In addition, a simple witness of Jesus also allows the abundant light of Jesus to shine from the most unlearned or disabled Christian who may only say, "Jesus is my God," "God loves me," "Jesus saved me," or "Jesus changed my life." These kinds of testimonies, together with the power of the Holy Spirit to convict, pursue, and change those lives that hear it, can bear tremendous fruit.

The third factor for overcoming is what Jesus taught and exemplified the most: *"and they did not love their lives, even when faced with death."* Being faced with death is not an indication of our overcoming the world, but in being prepared to be overcome by it - *"even when faced with death."* Inherent in this is that

we wage war “*against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6:12) and not against this world. His greatest and smallest teachings cover this, and He showed us how to do it.

His commandments, warnings, judgements, and requirements to overcome are therefore not another version of the Old Testament law, but instructions for the fulfillment of it. Jesus fulfills the sacrifice of the law by which we can live each day without the burden of sin. The Holy Spirit is the pillar of fire that resides in our hearts to fulfill the law through Jesus’ words, example, and life; not by decrees and ordinances done on our own, but by filling us with the living water and bread of life that gives us peace and wreaks havoc on the enemy of God to release his victims to the kingdom of Heaven.

His words may look unimaginably weighty, miserable, and beyond us according to our flesh, but by them our spirits and souls will find faith, hope, and love. Corrie Ten Boom once said, “Obedience is easy when you know you are being guided by a God who never makes mistakes.”<sup>2</sup>

The New Testament is full of such promises. “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome*” (1 John 5:3), “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:29-30), “*I came that they may have life, and have it*

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<sup>2</sup> Corrie Ten Boom and Jamie Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord*. (The Penguin Group, New York, NY, 1974).

## Hearing Jesus

*abundantly” (John 10:10), “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32), “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with Him” (John 14:23), “...these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves” (John 17:13), and “He (the Holy Spirit) will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:26-27, NKJV).*

In summary, the impending judgment of, “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26) can also be read as “faith without *His* works is dead,” and His works are found in obedience to His words. Again, Jesus did not suffer and die on the cross to supplement our lives; He died and rose so that we can supplement His.

Chapter 7

**THROUGH REPENTANCE**

The world is currently a great mountain of sin piled as high as the heavens with a colorful banner waving at its summit, hoping to remind God of His promise to not destroy it again. Much of the church, however, has contributed to this mountain, having built a gentle-winding, self-moving walkway with sturdy hand-rails of unrepentant forgiveness and cheap grace all the way to its peak.

Jesus said, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 16:19). If we have *neglected* our Lord’s warnings and judgments for ourselves, then how much more has the world *negated* them, together with His very existence?

In the 1800’s, the founder of the Salvation Army said, “The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell.” Today, this has come to pass by a deluge of messages on God’s love without the words of Jesus on what repentance and a

life in God really is. The propitiation of sins from a cross without the words of Christ has produced generations of Christians with the undenounced, unrepentant idolatry of heterosexual lust, fornication, and adultery; Christians who are lovers of the world with all its comforts, entertainments, and sensualities; Christians with material and financial covetousness that seek their own well-being through the excuse of ministering to their own rather than to their neighbors; Christians who are continuous victims of life instead of the rescued who rescue others; and Christians who have become the needy rather than the needed – needed by God to extend His mercy and needed by our neighbors to receive His mercy.

This “loosening” of Jesus’ words has resulted in numerous “loose” generations, and the degeneration of entire nations that fulfill the scripture, *“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death,*

*they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:26-32).*

In short, there is no teaching or desire to fulfill His greatest laws: *“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (Luke 10:27).* There is no longer any need to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbors as if they were our own family. Rather than, *“We love, because He first love us” (1 John 4:19),* we say that *“we don’t need to love because He first loved us.”* Rather than *“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2),* we say that *“Christ has fulfilled the law and borne my burden, thus I am free from His law.”*

Unfortunately, *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord...’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’” (Matthew 7:22-23);* *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:18-19).*

The Bible refers to the church as the bride of Jesus with whom there will one day be a wedding feast. However, over the course of the long engagement period, the bride has drifted apart from the bridegroom into a typical:

**She Says – He Says**

The church tells you how to have eternal life in heaven,  
Jesus tells you what that eternal life will look like  
on earth.

The church tells you about the finished work of Jesus,  
Jesus tells you about finishing His work through  
you.

The church tells you their teaching on eternal security,  
Jesus tells you His teaching on eternal security.

The church tells you that no one is perfect,  
Jesus tells you that you are to be perfect.

The church tells you that a believer is known by their  
doctrine,  
Jesus tells you that a believer is known by their  
deeds.

The church tells you that your good works are  
unnecessary,  
Jesus tells you that His good works through you are.

The church tells you that you are unconditionally  
forgiven,  
Jesus tells you His requirement to forgive.

The church tells you about God's unconditional love,  
Jesus tells you about His conditions for that love.

The church tells you to listen to the Bible,  
God tells you to listen to His Son.

All of this has resulted from an abundance of  
false grace and love from God that *covers* the church  
with our ideas of security, rather than His true grace  
and love that *flows through* it to those outside. It is no  
longer a new, living covenant with God, but a new  
sepulcher that contains the bones of modern dead men.  
Jesus *is* the fulfillment of the law, but we are the

fulfillment of Jesus' body Who continues His life on earth. Therefore, are we truly members of His body?

To the churches, however, He is still saying, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death"* (Revelation 2:11). He has not made it hard to repent, hear Him, and overcome. One can simply step off the mountain of sin and back onto the mountain of God. The trail on the first mountain of sin is gentle and meandering while the path to God on His Mountain will seem steep and rough. The path to Jesus is based on His words and His commandments to "be" the children we were "born again" to be.

We cannot, in our own strength, handle this path and we will quickly see, by the incredibly high bar of His words, that we will have no room to boast in "our works," but only in "His works" done through us. Jesus, alone, is the standard, the bar of our Christian life, and we are to meet that bar in the great or small ways in which He directs each of us. But the only way to achieve this is to continually bend ourselves under that bar and reach up for it – reach up for Him.

In reaching for Him, it is possible to achieve the perfection He seeks in us, although to the world (or to anyone who does not hear His voice) that perfection will not be anything enviable. Instead, it will be like someone who is *"...last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we*

*bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now”* (1 Corinthians 4:9-13, NKJV).

And again, Jesus defined His perfection as, *“Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets”* (Luke 6:22-23, NKJV).

His works, great and small, must be worked through us. We all have lifetimes of roots laid down in the comforts of this world: family, friends, careers, and possessions. He wants us to have these blessings and He has given them to us, but He wants our lives to be first through Him and second to them. We must go to sleep and wake up each morning planning what we will do, Lord willing, for *the kingdom of heaven*, not planning *the kingdom of us*.

Persecution and suffering reveal to us whether our roots are within ourselves or within Jesus. Indeed, those who have gone through or are currently going through the suffering of job instability, family loss, severe or terminal illness feel their roots dangling in the air. But our Heavenly Father knows how to garden! He knows how to transplant: to keep the roots, but change the soil. All that is required of us is submission and a temporary wilting in humility. Again, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 14:11).

The gardening process takes only a short lifetime compared to a long eternity, but through it we will blossom and tower with the power of Jesus coursing through us, and with the boasting of Jesus (in word and deed) to the whole world.

PART II

**HOW TO LOVE GOD**

Chapter 8

**LOVE GOD WITH EVERYTHING - HSMS**

*“...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”* (Mark 12:30).

This is the greatest commandment for His true children to obey. This verse targets everything about us – our entire being. To love God with complete Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength (HSMS); to love God with every passion, every hope, every thought, and every physical effort – to the last drop of each, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do join.

This love is to supersede that for spouse, children, friends, careers, houses, cars, clothing, and food; all the gifts of this life that God gives us. It lives completely outside the dissipations of this life: entertainment, relaxation, hobbies, interests, and anything else that qualifies as “the love of this world.” And it utterly destroys all flavors of idolatry, immorality, sensuality, and licentiousness that are avidly sought by this world.

Concerning this love, John said, *“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 lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:15-17, NKJV); Paul said, “...and whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23); and Jesus said, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”* (John 6:63).

## **Fear and Love**

As mentioned above, until this perfect HSMS love for God is achieved, it must be supplemented with the fear of God. The fear of God is an essential part of our HSMS love for God. As children we obey our parents in fear or love and do not put our hand on a hot stove. Fear originated from a parent’s warning, where the child fears either disobedience to their parents or the danger to which they were speaking. Or, without knowledge or understanding of the consequences, it is possible to respond to a warning out of love for the parent – a humble, simple, trusting, and innocent “because-you-say-so” type of love. Both fear and love work together in raising children (including us) toward “perfect love.”

The saying, “nothing to fear but fear itself” is a lie. There is nothing wrong with fear. It has been given by God for our protection. It is only our placement of fear that is in question, and it is the task of each child of God to learn where to place it and grow toward love from it. The fear of God brings us entirely under His preservation; and there is nothing in this world and no authority that is not subject to His authority.

Scripture also teaches us the relationship of fear, righteousness, and love through the earthly example of, *“For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same”* (Romans 13:3), and just a few verses later, *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed”* (Romans 13:10-11).

In these verses, fear is given to avoid doing evil (or for not doing that which is right), and love is the fulfillment of the law on earth. Under the authority of governments, which may or may not have placed themselves under the Heavenly Father’s authority, we can still do the right thing according to both God and them by obeying Jesus’ command to love our neighbor, and by paying whatever penalty a particular earthly authority declares for following God. Jesus said, *“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s”* (Matthew 22:21). Love in the face of people, politics, opinions, or aggression is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s law.

Thus, God uses both fear and love of Him to raise us as His children, and it is the Heavenly Father’s joy that, in His absolute authority given in perfect love, His true children should listen to His Son and thus be safe in Him, no matter what happens around them. Jesus is God, and it is His words of fire that will keep us safe through the fires of this world and away from the fires of hell. His words, alone, are life in a world of death.

As we climb the Mountain of God, we walk alongside a terrifying, high-mountain relief that overlooks a dying world below. Satan, however, attempts to deceive us by obscuring our view of both the precipice and the dying world beneath with dense fog. In place of the precipice, we are lulled into a false security of subtle dissipations and covetousness, or spectacular distractions of immorality and hatred; and all are forms of idolatry (Colossians 3:5) that originate from love of self or self-preservation.

The fear of God, however, acts as a hand rail that protects and supports us from the cliff while our feet have perfect security in the rock beneath us: the words and example of Jesus. Grasping the fear-of-God hand rail will allow us to shake off the white-out of temptation and to see the true danger that is so very close. Satan works constantly to distract us from the hand rail and disorient our direction on the rock in order to beacon each of us, as He did with Jesus, to throw ourselves down, saying that God will protect us in His forgiveness and grace (Matthew 4:5-7).

Today, many believers without the fear of God continually throw themselves down into sin, testing God each time and invoking the consequences that He has warned us of. There is, however, still time to discover and use His hand-rail of fear, His words, and His example with everything we have to, *“press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14) – from the fear of Him toward complete love for Him.

## Holiness and Righteousness

Jesus and His Apostles break down His commandment for the HSMS love of God as “holiness,” which is our internal *character* found in purity, thought, and action toward God, and “righteousness,” which is our external *conduct* found in service to other believers and to the world (e.g. good works). Our love through holiness defines our vertical relationship with Him while our love through righteousness defines His relationship through us to the world.

In general, most of the biblical “don’ts” target living a life holy unto God, while most of the “dos” target the righteousness of God to those around us. The “don’ts” keep us safe while the “dos” give us earthly purpose. Together, they represent following Jesus in this world, and they allow us to experience, in our own small ways, what the power and love of God have done for us and for the whole world.

Both character and conduct are seen in Romans Chapters 12-15, where Paul defines the love of God, or holiness, through the character of the believer, and discusses righteousness, or the conduct of believers via spiritual gifts. Furthermore, James defines both righteousness and holiness, respectively, as, “*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress (righteousness), and to keep oneself unstained by the world (holiness)*” (James 1:27). Finally, Jesus defines holiness and righteousness throughout His Beatitudes and in Revelation saying, “*Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice*

*righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy” (Revelation 22:11).*

Holiness separates us from the world, and unto God, through such commandments as to be pure in heart, moral in thought and deed, sincere and reverent, devoted, prayerful, meditative on His word, clean in our bodies and in our food and drink, not complaining, thankful, and rejoicing always.

There is absolutely nothing wrong and everything right about being as holy and separate from this world as we can, *except* when we flaunt it to others, have indignation for others, or separate ourselves from others based on the beliefs, unbeliefs or disbeliefs of others. In this case, holiness for God becomes self-righteousness toward the world and makes us equal to the Pharisee who prayed, *“God, I thank You that I am not like other people...”* (Luke 18:11).

Rather, knowing that our own sin is reflected in our lack of perfect love for our Heavenly Father, we humbly pray, *“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”* (Luke 18:13). We all know 1 John 1:9 that, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* But do we know the flanking verses? *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8) and, *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us”* (1 John 1:10). So, although we are washed by His blood, we are in continual need of it.

If being forgiven from sin and set apart in holiness deludes us into thinking that we are without sin, or results in any desire to be separated from anyone with sin, then according to the verses above we are 1)

deceived, 2) make Jesus a liar, and 3) have none of His truth and word in us. Thus, to be cleansed of sin but still indignant towards others puts us in the category of what both Jesus and Peter said, “...*the last state has become worse for them than the first*” (2 Peter 2:20, Matthew 12:45), where being cleansed by God simply leads to another form of uncleanness.

There is another connection between the “don’ts” of holiness and “dos” of righteousness. In His first commandment teaching of HSMS love for God, Jesus defines the second greatest commandment as “*the second is like it (like the first), you shall love your neighbor....*” (Matthew 22:39). Thus, we demonstrate our HSMS love for God through both holiness (purity) and righteousness (good works).

God does not strip down our lives by the “don’ts” of His holiness, without replacing those things by the “dos” of His righteousness. The idea that life in God is boring or inactive testifies that the fullness of Jesus’ way, truth, and life are not being heard within the church today. In hearing Jesus, however, our Heavenly Father’s fields and fishing boats will become endless expanses of harvest and oceans of opportunity, where our small efforts become the only place we “take His yoke and learn from Him” to find true life-satisfaction, purpose, and the fulfilment of His joy.

Thus, character before God (holiness) and conduct to our neighbors (righteousness) are distinguishable but inseparable. Doing one does not relinquish responsibility for the other, and God is not pleased by one without the other.

For instance, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ admonishment of the Pharisees did not negate the good works of prayer (holiness) and giving to the

poor (righteousness), but stressed the condition of the heart (character) when either are done for God (Matthew 6:1-7). Although Peter did not consider it right “*to neglect the word of God (holiness) in order to serve tables*” for the poor (righteousness) (Acts 6:2), it was a “server of tables,” Stephen, who became a strong preacher, miracle worker, and first martyr of the church. In addition, Paul later called out Peter for discriminating against “outsiders” in the church (bad conduct). Thus, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father*” (Colossians 3:17).

Satan, however, has deceived the church into believing that all works done as a Christian are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) or as dead works (Hebrews 9:14), and that they only fuel a religion toward God rather than a relationship with Him. Satan has twisted the repentance from dead works to negate the living works of our Lord through us. In fact, the verse preceding the admonishment of filthy rags is, “*You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways*” (Isaiah 64:5), and the verse describing the cleansing from dead works ends with the purpose of *servicing* the living God.

The quality of any relationship, however, is in how much and how well we work and live together with someone else. Coexisting is not working and living together – it is “your space” and “my space.” Thus, the church often leans much more toward the holiness part of our relationship with God, and away from His righteous interactions among a dark world that we are to follow Him in. Holiness alone allows us to follow our own ideas of righteousness in this world.

But being a Christian is not Him following us in the life, but us following Him in His life.

Compounding the faulty reasoning of filthy rags and dead works, the “good works” of Jesus may be thought to overlap with or be mistaken for the “humanitarian works” of governments and communities. As such, they are rejected so as not to confuse the two. God, however, will eventually have the credit and glory for all good things that the world receives, whoever they are done by.

The difference in good works done for or apart from Jesus, however, is simply found when they are done in the name of Jesus, together with a heart containing His infinite love and compassion. These kind of works fulfill His words, *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16), even though, *“we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?”* (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Indeed, who is adequate to extend the love of Jesus with one hand while pointing to the Righteous Judge of all people with the other? What a wonderful and fearful task we are called to. Although an HSMS love for God encompasses everything in our lives, and at times may seem overwhelming, the One Who gave everything is ready to teach and empower us for it each day and each minute of every day.

The world continually judges the holiness and righteousness of God through His children. The world believes that the “don’ts” of holiness are only given by

an oppressive dictator. They will, however, agree with some of the “dos” of righteousness, but only to justify their own purposes rather than God’s. They will take humanistic credit for them rather than give God the glory for doing them through His mercy and power.

For instance, God is seen as the oppressive tyrant whose “don’ts” rule out any sexual activity outside of His plan for a holy marriage between a man and a woman, but Jesus’ commandment to “judge not” is heartily endorsed to justify their immoral behavior.

Christians, however, do not obey a tyrant but a loving God who has been long suffering with this world since its beginning, and who still suffers with, but continually provides for His creation that hurts both Him and themselves through their own self-love and self-deceit. For believers, Jesus’ command to not judge is not a declaration of non-judgment against sin, but that He will execute judgment in His own time.

In addition, Satan, as an angel of light, has likewise deceived many in the church that the command to “don’t judge” is a declaration of “non-judgement,” so that sinful lifestyles of every kind are welcomed with open arms, rather than spoken against so that the house cleaning of one’s heart can be made for a new life in Jesus.

In contrast, we 1) speak of God’s judgment against sin, not the person; 2) are not to judge the person since, apart from Jesus’ rescue of us, we were also strangers to Him, and 3) realize that even after being born again still fall short of the high bar that He has set for our lives (Himself). We can only talk about God’s judgment and forgiveness if we are willing to humble ourselves and, *“confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be*

## Hearing Jesus

*healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*” (James 5:16). Healing from all sin falls under God’s judgment and mercy, and we are all in the same boat. But we must speak of judgment, confess ourselves, and pray for each other.

Chapter 9

**LOVE GOD WITH NOTHING**

The definitive state of loving God with everything is when we seem to have nothing to love Him with. Loving God with seemingly nothing is a time especially present during persecution and suffering, when there is an extreme lack of external and internal resources. At the minimum, however, He is still providing breath, consciousness, and any outside support no matter how small it may seem. It is a time where all things in this world (including us) are very small, and His redemption, forgiveness, Holy Spirit, grace, power, and perfection are very large.

Another term for loving with “nothing” is the Greek word, “kenosis” meaning to be emptied, where emptying can be either by circumstance or by our choice. There is a running theme in the words of Jesus, His apostles, and His prophets on how to demonstrate real love for God during the times that we are emptied.

For instance, *“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 10:38-39); *“And He said, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in*

*all that she had to live on” (Luke 21:3-4); “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29); “Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35); “But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away” (James 1:9-10); “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8).*

Persecution and suffering are the opportunities for our purist expression of HSMS love and communion with Him, and they are the times for perfect fellowship with Him. Corrie Ten Boom once said, “You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have.” It is the time when we truly open the door and invite Him in to dinner (Revelation 3:20), and when we really know that His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink (John 6:53-58). It is only at these times that we know there really is nothing other than God. He is everything, and nothing and nobody else is needed.

God, in His wisdom and plan, has ordained suffering for us since the time of Adam. Because of the curse of sin, and the eternal plan of God to mold us into His image (His character and conduct), suffering is an essential and inevitable part of this life: from the

process of birth, to the disciplines of education, the sweat and anxieties of work and family; through illness, injury, disease, and accident; and in the death of loved ones or ourselves. Suffering is an inevitable but essential part of this life, and God allows it – it is part of His perfect plan.

First and foremost, He Himself suffers because of it. He leads the way in it. He stifles His wrath; He forgives, is patient, loves His enemies, and is longsuffering; and He is grieved, quenched, mocked, and ignored. He handed over His perfect, loving Son to His enemies (to us and the world) in order to broker peace with us, and then watched as His perfect beacon of love, generosity, and mercy was ignored, scorned, tortured and brutally killed.

And He continues to endure the same things as it is repeated among so many of His faithful children around the world who follow His firstborn Son into similar persecution. He continues, also, to strive with all the people of the world (that are like children to Him) who are deceived and distracted away from Him; He waits patiently and woos gently. He provides all good things for all who live, whether or not they acknowledge Him for it, or whether they use it only for themselves or for evil.

He is longsuffering and He allows all of His creation to suffer along with Him, *“For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God”* (Romans 8:19-21).

Although He is above all, He does all of this for our sake.

In that minutia of time within eternity which we call a lifespan, our suffering creates repeated forks in the road leading to eternal life or eternal death. It fosters hope or hopelessness. It promotes dependence on God or independence from Him. It allows us to see more of Jesus or hardens our hearts and blinds our eyes to Him. It creates compassion for, or bitterness towards others. It teaches us obedience to God or a disdain for His ways. It leads us to humility before God or to become a boastful survivor.

But endurance through suffering for Jesus sake will yield the crown of life and all of the rewards that He promised in His seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation. For all of its difficulties, a willingness to be yoked to Jesus in His purpose and His work is the only way that *“YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:29-30), and that *“he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”* (John 6:35). For all its difficulties, Paul said, *“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison”* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Apart from God, suffering leads us to Him; with God, suffering creates a deeper fellowship with Him that brings riches to both us and others. *“So death works in us, but life in you”* (2 Corinthians 4:12).

Jesus, on the verge of His crucifixion, taught us to follow His example in loving His father with everything in the midst of nothing, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

*He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him”* (John 12:24-26).

Then He taught us His own response to suffering, *“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour”* (John 12:27). Likewise, that must be our response. Although it is more common for us to pray the words He refused, *“Father, save me from this hour,”* suffering in His purpose must reflect His response, in our own small way, and in which we pray, *“for this purpose you saved me!”* At that point, we can also pray for the only worthy result of our suffering, *“Father, glorify Your name,”* and know that God will answer us, in the same way He did His Son, *“Then a voice came out of heaven: ‘I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again’”* (John 12:28). The glory of the Father brings the glory of His son, which brings the glory of His body: us.

Persecution is certainly the summit of how to love God with “nothing.” In persecution our lives as we know them are either threatened, steadily altered, or abruptly halted. We are living (and dying) in the same way as first century Christians did, as millions of other Christians throughout the world have done, and as millions of Christians are currently doing. Jesus wants to prepare us for this so that we will not be shocked, discouraged, or deceived. He taught us to expect it and to know that it was a highlight, even a privilege, of following Him. He wants us to know that no matter how brutal, dark, and hideous this world turns against Him, He has authority over it all, brings hope to all who

follow Him, and will set things completely right at His perfect time.

By faith Abraham believed that God could raise his son from the dead, by faith we believe the Heavenly Father has raised His Son from the dead, and by faith we believe that the Lord will do the same for us, our loved ones, and those He gives us in our ministry. But God prepared Abraham for this level of faith through a lifetime of increasingly difficult situations, and He prepares us in the same way through the commandments He has given us. What starts as faith turns into sight, first in His transforming power at the cross, and subsequently through day-to-day living where our own lives transform into His, with all of His purpose and power.

Jesus warned us to be prepared, *“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also”* (John 15:18-20). Paul warned us to be prepared, *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:12). And Peter warned us to be prepared, *“For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you*

*an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:19-21).*

If we are not willing, suffering under persecution is a discipline from God. But if we are willing (which can happen in a single moment of humility, surrender, and a desire to hear and do things His way), persecution is the highest opportunity to love God with everything – when we have nothing. *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matthew 5:10-11).*

As mentioned before in the seven letters of Revelation, only the Church of Smyrna did not receive a strong rebuke with instruction to repent, and what was their reward? *“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).* In following Him, there is a high calling with high rewards.

Our Lord expands His kingdom through His own body; that is, through our faithfulness. It is, however, done through the smallest of faith in the weakest of self. *“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10); “...The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches”*

(Matthew 13:31-32, NKJV); *“The smallest one will become a clan, And the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time”* (Isaiah 60:22).

Although persecution and death may seem like the end of any meaningful ministry, it is actually the start of bearing the most fruit. Again, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (John 12:24).

Every adult lives and dies having tried in the smallest or greatest ways, which seemed right to them, to have been something in this world. Rather than living and dying for this world, however, Jesus has given us the opportunity to live and die for Him and His kingdom, whether through physical sufferings or spiritual persecutions. Only in Him can we be anything, *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.’ ‘O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:53-58, NKJV).

Chapter 10

**LOVE GOD BY LOVING HIS SON**

The only way to love the Father with everything while we have seemingly nothing is to hear, obey, and follow His Son, Jesus. Jesus is God. Again, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being*” (John 1:1-3). “*...I and the Father are one...*” (John 10:30). “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father;*” “*...apart from Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). “*...for One is your Leader, that is, Christ*” (Matthew 23:10). “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Revelation 1:8). “*... ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’*” (Matthew 28:18).

Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China and founder of the current Overseas Missionary Fellowship said, “Christ is either Lord of all, or is not Lord at all.”<sup>3</sup> If Jesus is truly God in our life, than He

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Steer. *Hudson Taylor: Lessons in Discipleship*. (OMF International, 1995).

makes all the difference in who we are, what we do, and how we respond to this life.

Jesus is our King and, likewise, He must be the primary leader for each of us. All biblical instruction must be filtered through His words, all ministries must be filtered through His words, all decisions we make each day must be filtered through His words, and all the circumstances of life must be filtered through His words.

Of all the leadership roles provided by churches and Christian organizations, each Christian must have only one leader, teacher, and King Who they are forever accountable. Jesus is the General of any organized effort for Him. He says, *“But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ”* (Matthew 23:8-10).

Thus, most church and ministry leaders and teachers who hear His words are more than willing to consider themselves as “instruments” (even “First Chair Instruments”), “lead servants,” or even “major slaves.” Each Christian, from the greatest to the least, are “all brothers” and each is only a steward of the gifts that God has given them with which to point to His Son. Likewise, from morning until night and even through the night, Jesus is our Leader and Lord and we must always tune our ears to hear Him.

We are no longer children of this world but are children of His kingdom, by which we are also called to be His subjects, His priests, His bond-slaves, and His soldiers. Paul told Timothy to, *“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 2:3).

If we walk in His Spirit and follow Him as His soldiers, then He has authority over every aspect of our lives, and at which point every circumstance in life we face, great or small, is simply another directive from our General that we are to engage through His power and for His purpose.

In this military-like mindset, the daily grind takes on all new meaning. If we cannot sleep, if we are running out of time, if we are trying to fix problems within bigger problems, if we feel that no one supports us, if we can't get a break, if we are in pain, or if we are faced with a myriad of other difficulties, than we must consider it all as a directive from Him that we are to assault head on in humility, patience, and love. Although we may feel subjected by circumstances, we must first subject ourselves to Him; and, in that mindset, He will provide direction, wisdom, and power. Through these things He disciplines us and we discipline ourselves to Him.

But with training we come to realize that everything has a purpose and even many layers of purpose that we cannot fully comprehend. In subjection to Him as our Leader, the most purposeless things obtain purpose and we find that we are actually very "well-kept" children rather than victims tossed about by every wave of life. With training we find that we can truly fulfill the scriptures to, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:4); to, "*always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father*" (Ephesians 5:20); and to, "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong*" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Subjection to Him in everyday circumstances is a choice, and subjection over a lifetime requires a lot of

choices. Our resolve to humble and subject ourselves to His will and to stand firm in Him throughout each day over our entire lives, results in our being “yoked” to Him, in seeing the world through His eyes and purpose, and in obtaining the daily and eternal rewards that go with it.

This mindset makes all the difference whether you’re trying to find a parking space, raising a family, living in the streets, going through cancer, or living (and dying) in persecution. It is only through this mindset that we will know the, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”* (John 14:27). Subjection to Him in all circumstances is peace with Him and the world in all circumstances.

Seeing Jesus as our only leader through all circumstances also allows us to come to have the fullest measure of the Father through Him. *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him’”* (John 14:6-7).

The cross, the propitiation of sin through the Lord’s death and resurrection, allows anyone to be born again in the Spirit of God and to become His child. This is the beginning of life in God through Jesus, and represents Jesus as the “Alpha,” the beginning of our lives. Jesus said, however, *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”* (Revelation 22:12-13).

Acceptance of His work on the cross starts us in Jesus, but obedience to His life and words are what cause us to grow in Him. Salvation from our sins comes from His death, while new life in us comes from His words and commandments. If the latter is neglected, then we have only His death, and we become like lost orphans trying to find our risen Lord through a maze of doctrinal streets, or while resting at comfortable church shelters teaching that following Him toward Omega is unnecessary. In such shelters, Jesus, at best, is given a role to play in salvation, but His part as our primary leader and teacher are diminished or ignored.

In reality, however, Jesus' death and resurrection, together with every command and example He gave us, is the real gospel – the Alpha through Omega gospel. The good news of the cross must continue toward the good news that He has authority over all things, the good news that we have a purpose in humbling ourselves or in being humbled, the good news that we must forgive to be forgiven, the good news that we must show mercy to receive mercy, the good news that we must give or lose everything for God and for the love of our neighbor, and the good news that no matter how dark, evil, or perverse things get, *“the gates of hell shall not prevail”* (Matthew 16:18). Thus, the good news of Alpha without the good news of Omega is dead. *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:26), and those works are His works through us.

He gave us clear, conditional statements that we will only abide in Him and in His love if we keep His commandments and seek the fulfillment of His words in our lives; *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”* (John 14:15); *“He who has My*

*commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him”* (John 14:21); *“He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me”* (John 14:24); *“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned”* (John 15:6); and *“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”* (John 15:10). These conditions were reiterated by Paul, *“...Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off”* (Romans 11:20-22).

Rather than humbling themselves and seeking to believe Him, people are more fond of obtaining a “knowledge” of God rather than an obedience to Him. With great knowledge they exclaim, “once saved, always saved,” and do not realize that they are saying, “we have become rich and in need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17). Unfortunately, for many this level of knowledge is the beginning and end of Jesus in their lives, and is a far cry from the spirit of His words to us that, “once in need of repentance, always in need of repentance,” “once in need of mercy, always in need of mercy,” “once in need of obedience, always in need of obedience,” “once in need of abiding in Him, always in need of abiding in Him,” “once in need of forgiving others, always in need of forgiving others,” “once in need of showing mercy to others, always in need of

showing mercy to others,” “once in need of being the light and salt of the world, always in need of being the light and salt of the world.”

Perhaps those who do not need to do the things Jesus spoke of do not really need Jesus. Jesus said, “*But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God*” (John 3:21). Jesus is a living God who lives through us, not the acquisition of “knowledge that makes arrogant” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Over the centuries religious wars between Catholics and Protestants or among Protestants have advocated indignation, animosity, and death due to the inflexibility of each concerning their various “traditions of men” and their “doctrines of demons.” They did not advocate these things over the words and deeds of Jesus because doing so would have condemned them outright. “*For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed*” (John 3:20).

In Jesus, however, there is room for seeking and finding, for failure and success, for struggling and abiding, and even for being “hot or cold.” But there is no room for neglect, apathy, unresponsiveness, triviality, or laziness to Him and what He told us to do. There is no room for the sedative, spoiled statements of, “let go and let God,” “don’t try so hard,” “stop striving,” “I’m rich in Jesus,” or “Jesus did it all.”

Jesus has indeed done it all, but He is still doing it and we are an integral part of His ongoing work. When we see His work through us there will be no mistaking it for the “lukewarmness” that He promises to eventually spit from His mouth (Revelation 3:16). From this promise He continues, “*Because you say, ‘I*

*am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, ' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (Revelation 3:17-18).*

The assurance of His eternal salvation in our selves comes from seeing His fruit born out in ourselves – in seeing His good works, both His character and conduct in us. The only thing we will be assured of is that those works did not come from ourselves and are from Him. They are works that we work hard to confess Him in. We are saved to live before we are saved to know; and just as in natural life, knowledge follows experience.

His conditions are the fullness of Him and the fullness of life. They are for everyone – in the greatest or smallest gift of faith they receive from Him. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3) and, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30).* Who would not want a salvation of life rather than a salvation of knowledge?

We have an Omniscient Father who makes an all-inclusive, comprehensive covenant with us. He knows what He is talking about concerning life and death. He has given more than we can ever imagine, creates life from death in us, and provides all gifts, power and instructions to do the good works He

commands. If righteous works done apart from Him are as “filthy garments” (Isaiah 64:6), what does it mean to reject His righteous works that He has prepared and empowered us for? *“But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand”* (Isaiah 64:8).

In Jesus’ words and life we are molded as clay so that we can say, *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Revelation 19:7-8). Are we willing, then, to let Jesus mold us as clay, to buy from Him white garments to hide the shame of our nakedness, and to make ourselves ready for Him in the fine linens of His righteous acts through us?

Or alternatively, are we calling all to the wedding feast of the lamb without getting them prepared to be there? *“Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen”* (Matthew 22:9-14).

Will the ones we call show up in the right clothes? “...for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Revelation 19:8). We work His works of holiness and righteousness because of who we are, not because of what we can ever earn. They are ours to live in or to ignore. Salvation is a gift and so are His works through us. These are not the kind of gifts, however, that can be returned or put into a closet and forgotten. They are gifts of life and without them we have only the opposite of life.

## **Perfection**

The end result of our HSMS love for God that Jesus wants for us is something often spoken against: perfection. Jesus said, “*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48).

Why is this commandment a stumbling block for so many? If we love Jesus, don’t we yearn to be like Him? The world is full of human idols that people desire to become like or to share in their wealth, yet when the only True Person of Worship beacons us to His level, to share all the wealth that is His (and providing all the wisdom and power to do so), it is met with disdain or indifference. The command for an HSMS love of God, however, is to love God perfectly. Perfect love casts out all fear and it is also the perfection of His life in and through us.

In Jesus’ HSMS love of His Father, we are told that, “*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation*” (Hebrews 5:8-9). Jesus was, of course, perfectly obedient to His Heavenly

Father and without sin. It is another mystery how, in being perfect, He had to “learn obedience” to God through “the things which He suffered.”

But if the perfect Son had to learn obedience, how much more do we, as imperfect children, have to learn it, strive for it, and endure toward it our entire lives? Jesus is the high bar of perfection and it is for Him we are to reach. *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21).

To many, the idea of perfection sounds like self-righteousness, boasting, and a desire for public admiration. In reality, though, this interpretation is a smoke screen to the idea of following Jesus. Jesus’ teaching and example of a path to perfection does not leave much room for self-righteousness, boasting, and a desire for public admiration. Perfection in Him is not something that the “natural self” of any person would ever seek. Rather, it is a goal for the spirit and the soul, and a goal in which the body must be subjected to.

The path to perfection is discussed and demonstrated throughout scripture: *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!”* (Matthew 10:24-25, NKJV). *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying*

## Hearing Jesus

*of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:7-11). “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1). “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal” (John 12:25). Looking toward the goal, however, we can know that, “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10). May we not be deceived about God’s path for us. Jesus is truth and His words are truth. Jesus is God.*

PART III

**HOW TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR**

Chapter 11

**LOVE LIKE AND LOVE AS**

As stated above, fulfillment of the second greatest commandment contributes to fulfillment of the first. In referencing the first commandment to love God with everything we have, Jesus said, *“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’”* (Matthew 22:39).

Therefore, the second *is like* the first, and we demonstrate our HSMS love for God when we love our neighbor as ourselves. If we love the Father than we will love our neighbor, and if we do not love our neighbor than we do not love the Father: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* (1 John 4:7-8, NKJV). And like the first commandment, we must love our neighbor with everything we have, with the seemingly nothing we have, and through following the words and examples of Jesus.

Before discussing what the love our neighbor is, it is important to distinguish it from current worldly definitions of love. The love of one’s neighbor that comes through the commandment of God, the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, and the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the

world's philosophy of tolerance, or the conquering of hate by human love.

First and foremost, this latter type of love is devoid of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is only an angel-of-light mockery that will be devoid of all that the trinity will implement in achieving true love for one's neighbor. It will not be under the commandments of God, nor the teachings and example of Jesus, nor have any power and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

The depths of the world's love can only go as far as their own depth of ideas, purposes, and power, while the love of God is limitless and will have limitless seen and unseen effects on us and others. There is no comparison between self-serving and God-serving love. The idea of "tolerance" itself comes from a self-serving heart of "live-and-let-live" philosophy. Its true purpose is to keep others at arm's length or to allow them their own groups so that one can pursue their own life and live their own dream.

And a dream it is, from which they will wake into the nightmare of the wrath of God who created them to learn to love Him and to love one's neighbor as they love themselves. They will wake up to find that it was God, rather than themselves, Who provided all life, food, cloths, and comfort; to find that they returned to Him only a cry for entertainment and dissipation; and to find that their definition of love was simply a cover for "*take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry*" (Luke 12:19). And sadly, they will find that it was they, "*whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things*" (Philippians 3:19).

In contrast, the true love of God and one's neighbor is in having become like a child who is

already color, ethnically, and socially blind, and in considering others more important than ourselves, and in bearing each other's burdens, and in, "*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). True love is, "*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 10:38-39). We cannot truly love our neighbor until we first love God, and true love is in hearing and following Jesus.

Jesus is our role model for the perfect HSMS love of God. And perhaps surprisingly, Jesus teaches that we are our own role models for how we are to love our neighbors. The Lord's command to love one's neighbor *as yourself* reflects all of our self-serving, self-seeking, self-rewarding, and self-comforting natures are to be used as a guide in what we are to do for our neighbors. Everything about how we love ourselves or love those who are part of our lives – our immediate families, friends, and associates – is to guide us in how we are to love our neighbor. Jesus says, "*If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same*" (Luke 6:32-33).

Do we seek food, shelter, and clothing for ourselves or our families? Then that is to be provided for our neighbors who lack these things. Do we seek family and friends to share our lives with? Than that is to be provided to our neighbors who are isolated and lonely. Would we hope that family and friends will comfort us in times of anxiety or sadness? Than that is what we must do for our neighbors. Do we wish that

someone who is angry with us would understand things according to our perspective? Than when we are angry at our neighbor, we must put it away and seek to understand them. Are we willing to fight for what belongs to us and for our rights? Than we must love those with different belongings and rights (*“But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two”* Matthew 5:39-41, NKJV).

We can do all these things knowing that the Lord has deferred His belongings and rights for us and the world until His future time of justice (*“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord”* Romans 12:19). Are we grateful that the Lord saved us from His “vengeance” that we deserved? Than we must let others know we are grateful, and how they, too, can have Him. Whatever good we would like to see in our own lives qualifies as a ministry to our neighbors.

We must examine all the ways that we are self-centered and covetous and use it to instruct us on how to love our neighbor. Thus, the second greatest commandment forces us to look at and acknowledge the “self” that permeates our own hearts and then turn it into the well-being and blessing of others.

This teaching also allows us to see just how much we judge or have indignation toward others, and we can examine those feelings in order to use them as instruction for how God will judge us. *“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge,*

*you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1-2).*

The adage of pointing a finger at someone with three fingers pointing back at ourselves represents this very well. For instance, do others have a spirit of entitlement? Do others take all that is given them without any appreciation of it, or without giving back to others who are in need? Do others spend all their time and money on themselves while expecting the world to cater to them? Do others complain about everything? Do others see themselves as victims? Do others have immorality in their lives? In whatever things we see as bad in others, Jesus guarantees that God sees them within us, however small we think they are. The only difference between us and others is that we somehow justify those things within ourselves.

Although the Spirit of God is in us, our “self” is perpetually there, too. This is why Jesus gives us His “conditions” of life in saying, *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:36-38).* All of the amazing things we received at the cross are to be appreciated by extending them, in kind, to others. Only in these ways is His Spirit alive in us and our “self” dead in us.

Likewise, Jesus also says, *“Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7).* His condition for us to extend mercy in order to receive mercy sets up a cycle from Himself, to us, to others,

and back to Himself. In an opposite cycle, judgment of others produces indignation that quenches the Holy Spirit from loving others. Again, in putting ourselves under the context of Jesus' words and God's judgments of receiving His mercy, we remember the cross that gave us undeserved mercy, stifle our indignation for others, extend mercy to them, receive it again from Him, and rejoice in the whole process of His love to and through us.

This cycle completes a rotation as it goes back to bless our Father and Lord as He says, "... *Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me*" (Matthew 25:40). Any parent who has witnessed their child being a blessing to others knows a little of this.

In addition, the commandment to love our neighbor does not bind us according to circumstance. In whatever our situation – strong or weak, stable or unstable, rich or poor, healthy or sick, happy or sad – we can choose to minister and bless others in some way. "*Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need*" (Philippians 4:11-12). Jesus gave His word to every one of His children, those at the top of the ladder, those in a house, those in a hospital, and those in the street. It can be understood and done by anyone.

As Jesus trains us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are again yoked to Him, pulling with Him as we perceive His direction and move together

with Him. We experience with Him, in our own small ways, His own self-emptying love for the world, His patience and forbearance against all the hostility and greed toward Him, and His provision of all good things to us and to the world no matter how they use or abuse it.

We experience, again, how His kindness leads us and others to repentance, and how His love for us and the world compels us even more to Him. We can see how transient this life is, that it is only a short duration proving ground to learn of Him and His ways. We will discover that all effort, pain, discomfort, and tears are just a minutia of time compared to an eternity with Him. We will know that our suffering was just an opportunity to understand His suffering and the love that was poured out and continues to be poured out through it. We will know that our suffering is a small thing compared to the Giver and Provider for all life and the One who bears the burden of every person and creature since its beginning.

Although He sent us out from the Garden of Eden, He also came out to care and provide for us. What a joy it is to worship Him now and forever. *“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’*

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*And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped” (Revelation 5:11-14).*

## Chapter 12

### **WHO WE ARE TO LOVE**

#### **Everyone**

The verse, “*For God so loved the world...*” (John 3:16) indicates that anyone in the world is to be considered our neighbor to whom we are to love. More specifically, whoever God brings into our lives from the world on any given day is to be our neighbor. Everyone is eligible to benefit from the love that God gives us to give to them.

Of course, the question of “*And who is my neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29) was put directly to Jesus by a lawyer, albeit in selfishness. But regardless of the motive, our Lord is glad to teach us and He answered the lawyer with the story of “The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37). This story illustrates that anyone we see with need is our neighbor who requires the righteousness of God through us; and that those good works must come from real compassion that translates into the spending of time, strength, and money – regardless of how much or little of those resources we have.

We must do this because it is not our time, strength, and money but the Lord’s. We are only stewards of all that we think we possess and the

stewards, themselves, are replenished as needed. All of the time-, strength-, and money-actions of the Good Samaritan are only a small reflection of what the Lord gives each of us every day – life, provision, healing, and support. He requires us to share His provision, in our own small ways, to those around us.

Also, He repeatedly warned us about not living this way. For example, *“Then He said to them, ‘Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions’”* (Luke 12:15), and in the same discourse, *“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (Luke 12:19-21). The one who loves their neighbor shows mercy to their neighbor with whatever they have to offer.

All of Jesus’ examples and illustrations are given for “common” people. Scripture gives us many role models that show how the *least* in this world can be the *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven. In scripture, it is always the “nobodies” who served a “great somebody” by their smallest faith and faithfulness; and as a result they have had their testimonies proclaimed to the world for over 2000 years.

No one has “witnessed” to more people, more powerfully than a prostitute, a poor widow, a thief, a blind beggar, a cloths maker, a poor Samaritan woman, a Canaanite woman, a little girl, and numerous outcast lepers and invalids. Their stories are displayed to us, and displayed eternally to the glory of our Lord. Ours

will be, too, if we consistently seek the smallest ways of serving Him and our neighbor through humility, kindness, gentleness, and meekness. Jesus said, “*But many who are first will be last; and the last, first*” (Matthew 19:30). We must actively seek to be the last and to love those who are last because it is the nobodies who will become the somebodies of our Lord.

Likewise, in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus separates the *keepers* of God’s word from the *conduits* of it. The priest and Levite who avoided the man in the road were keepers, not conduits, of God’s word. They made themselves as “Bankers” over God’s word which they locked up in a vault of self-arrogance, higher learning, and the indignation of others. Their knowledge locked up God’s love to the world around them. The Bankers were able to pick out small parts of His word, like a fist-full of dollars, with which to wave around in order to look good to others, but they ignored the weightier parts of investing that treasure because of their greed and contempt for others.

Today, unfortunately, we do the same thing. We are Bankers of the knowledge of God’s word; we have knowledge of grace and the propitiation of sins, of religion and belief, of the law and faith. We know a mystery or two with which to start a denomination against those who “don’t know the truth.” We can simultaneously worship and point fingers at others, worship and plan out our next week, worship and ponder lunch, or worship and drink a latte.

In church we can lift up both arms, but outside we cannot lift a finger to the darkness of sin and its despair and death. We smack down the plethora of Jesus’ commands for His “good works” to be expressed through us, saying that they negate the cross or that they

are works of filthy rags. We preach to cease striving for heaven, but instead, please join us in our disapproval for others, our covetous and comfortable life-style, and our Jesus-washed worldly living.

We continuously tune-out our neighbors with the self-righteous “ministries” of family and careers, time and money, or relaxation and work. We know right from wrong rather than the righteousness of what Jesus told us to be; like Bankers, we are vaults of doctrine rather than the investors of Jesus’ words.

Consequently, this very book must be weighed under the same light. It contains a lot of words in which to say only two necessary things, “hear Jesus” and “follow Jesus.” Each of us will be accountable to Him for that at His judgment seat, and each of us will hear Him how we hear Him.

Jesus declares this in “The Good Samaritan,” *“And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’”* (Luke 10:25-26). Rather than tell the lawyer plainly, Jesus, the Living Word of God asks, *“How does it read to you?”* This is where each person’s heart comes to meet the heart of Jesus, and where each person decides to make His life their life. He wants us, individually, to come to Him, hear Him, and follow Him.

In that light, everything else in this book is only a testimony of the power, purpose, and peace which the author has found in hearing Jesus’ words. It is not even comparable to the amazing testimony the 70 disciples shared when they returned after having been sent out to multiple cities by Jesus (Luke 10:1-24). This testimony occurs at the encounter with the Lawyer who provoked

Jesus' illustration of the "Good Samaritan." Thus, one can imagine a face-off between the "disciples of doing" and the "disciples of knowing." Jesus, however, patiently taught them both and, likewise, He is still patiently teaching all of us, today.

In contrast to those who wish to bottleneck Jesus' words in arguments of "biblically-correct" knowledge, a true disciple is "Jesus-correct" living: a conduit, a vessel, or an instrument; a vine branch, a tree, or a stem of wheat that allows God's grace to flow through it and bear fruit; fruit that is expressed and supported until it matures and falls to the ground to bear its own fruit.

Prior to Jesus we could not be a conduit of His love. In Jesus, the Holy Spirit brings the perfect laws of the Heavenly Father, coalesced by His words, together with the strength and provision of the Holy Spirit into us and then out to others. To obstruct His good works of righteousness is to obstruct Him.

Following Jesus throughout our lives is the other 99% of repentance and "belief" in Him that brings eternal life (John 3:16). We are constantly exhorted of this: "*Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2); "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7); and "*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary*" (Galatians 6:9).

While many see such unconditional love, as that described in the "Good Samaritan," as wasted on a dark world of greed, ingratitude, or entitlement, in reality it is the opening of channel locks between the oceans of heaven and earth that allow His living water to flow through us. And when His living water flows, others

are blessed, fruit is borne, and we ourselves are healed, revived, and empowered. The gates of these locks, however, are not one-open and one-closed but both opened simultaneously so that His living water changes levels quickly through us.

The upward gate represents our obedience to the love, purity, and holiness of God, while the downward gate represents our obedience to love our neighbor. If we fear that loving our neighbor will hinder or deplete our lives, we will close the downward gate and hide out from this world, deceiving ourselves that we have His holiness through the upward gate. In this case we become “lights hidden under a basket.” *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14-16, NKJV).

Alternatively, if we fear that His holiness will take away our enjoyment (our immorality, lusts, and dissipations), we close the upward gate and try to justify ourselves in Him with the excuse that we love our neighbor. In this case, we become the salt of the earth that has become indistinguishable from this world and thus tasteless. *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men”* (Matthew 5:13).

The gates of holiness to God and righteousness to the world, however, must both be open, and this is reflected beautifully by James as, *“Pure and undefiled*

*religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). Jesus, our King of Glory, provides an abundance of instruction on how to keep both gates open. Therefore, “Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in! Who is the King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle” (Psalms 24:7-8).*

Allowing His living water to change levels within us can look scary, and it takes faith through humility, repentance, and obedience to keep them both open on a daily basis. Each day we can close one or the other gates in many ways so that, *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Thankfully, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

Living this way is a process and requires training ourselves to hear Jesus more and more throughout our lives. In reading the verse, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20)* under its original intent, rather than as a beckoning to unbelievers, Jesus is warning Christians of their dangerous lukewarm position – in having His living water stagnate within the locks. His words that flank this verse are, *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19), and “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame 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 3:21-22).*

Jesus always defines the problem as being able to hear Him knock – in all that He says, instructs, commands, judges, and promises. But what a promise for this life if we hear Him knock daily – and then to open the door daily to dine with Jesus in the fellowship of our hearts. Together, His warnings and promises are hope – and what a hope it is!

### **The Least of These**

Jesus also described who our neighbor is in regard to His judgment for who He welcomes or does not welcome into His kingdom. This is the most detailed description of the Day of Judgment in scripture where eternal life and eternal punishment are clearly defined.

*“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?*

*And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).*

All people will be judged by Jesus, not by what any one defines as a “relationship” with Him, but by what He defines as the product of that relationship; and specifically, the product that was extended to “the least of these.”

Our Lord provides details on “the least of these” in the above passage. First, they are any who have physical, emotional, or spiritual needs; second, they are said to be “*these brothers of Mine;*” and third, that through them Jesus, Himself, is the object of our love. The Lord states both here and throughout scripture that He highlights His mercy to the world through those who are marginalized and suffering. “*He raises the*

*poor from the dust And lifts the needy from the ash heap, To make them sit with princes, With the princes of His people. He makes the barren woman abide in the house As a joyful mother of children. Praise the LORD!”* (Psalms 113:7-9), *“Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried”* (Luke 16:22), *“But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”* (Luke 14:13-14), *“For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, ‘Buy the things we have need of for the feast;’ or else, that he should give something to the poor”* (John 13:29) (The disciples were accustomed to Jesus giving money to the poor), and *“Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”* (James 2:5).

He is the savior of all people, but the friend and upholder of the hurt, disabled, and destitute. Thus, His mercy is highlighted on the poor and He has given His children that same task – with whatever resources they have – to extend mercy to *the least of these, His brethren.*

From the early days of the church, however, there has been a resistance to “the least of these.” In extending the passage of James from above, he says, *“But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? If, however, you are fulfilling 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" (James 2:6-9).*

This "partiality" against the homeless, poor, disabled, or marginalized arises from a number of deceptions, foremost of which is our covetousness of time, money, and possessions. Covetousness arises from our failure to believe that all these resources come from the Lord, and that they are most fully arranged and replenished when used for His purposes. Second, many also desire social approval from others at certain education or income levels, and a life that is routinely focused on the poor will cause a distancing of peers due to the conviction of their own need to do the same.

Third, partiality also arises from a deception that the poor are somehow "unblessed" by God because of their situation, while those with a better social standing are "blessed" by Him. Compared to those who are more socially stable and accepted, the "least of these" are least because of the choices or effort they make in life. This deception goes even further with an underlying insinuation that the extremely poor or destitute cannot be Christians or are, at best, Christians who are unrepentant in sin. As such, it is thought that they should be left to God's judgment or discipline, respectively. The disciples provided this inference after hearing Jesus say, *"Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* *When the disciples heard this, they were very*

*astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"* (Matthew 19:23-25).

Those showing partiality against the poor, however, do not understand that any judgments they make against the poor will ultimately be used to describe them at the judgment seat of Christ. *"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you"* (Matthew 7:2). Do the poor misuse their meager incomes? Then those with more financial stability must ask themselves how much of what they have received from the Lord is spent on comfort, convenience, and relaxation. In the same way, do those with means even tithe 10% in thanksgiving to what the Lord has given, let alone seek the same commendation He gave to the poor widow who gave all that she had to live on? Everyone prays, "Lord, give me this or give me that" but how many pray, "Lord, show me how to give?"

Do the poor have a sense of entitlement to be helped by the government or the church? Then Christians above the poverty line must ask how much do they live as though entitled to God's love and provision. Is any Christian worthy of that love and provision? Is it taken for granted?

Many verses in the Old and New Testaments address the spirit of entitlement by Israel and the church, respectively. Examples include, *"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your*

*heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). “Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made” (Isaiah 2:8). “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:19-21). “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:8-10).*

Throughout scripture, God constantly warns His children to not slip into the entitlement of His love, grace, and provision; a state that we constantly slide into, and a place from which we need to repent.

Many feel that helping the poor and homeless will only enable them to make more bad choices, to continue in substance abuse, or to remain in poverty. These ideas, however, embrace no real concern for the poor or disabled; rather, they simply reflect hearts that love money over God. *“No servant can serve two*

*masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”* (Luke 16:13). This scripture shows mutual exclusivity – it is one or the other, and both do not happen at the same time.

God provides for both the rich and the poor, but He will be glorified through the simple faith of the poor as He cared for them and eventually lifted them up to eternity. This He illustrated by in His story of Lazarus, the destitute and diseased man who was completely ignored at the rich man’s gate. As an example to us, Jesus provided His judgments of Lazarus and the rich man, delivered through Abraham, *“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony”* (Luke 16:25). In God’s judgment, the rich appear to God how the poor appear to the rich. Serving “the least of these” with our time, money, and possessions is a form of worship to God by which we thank Him for all good things.

Many see the difficulties of others as resulting from their choices in life. And in many respects to God’s word, that is absolutely true. Jesus equated sickness with sin and that healing could take place through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. *“And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven’”* (Matthew 9:2). He also said, in no uncertain terms, that the result of sin (not believing in Him) is ultimately death, *“Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all*

*the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:4-5). There is both temporal and eternal judgment of sin.

Economic status, however, has nothing to do with choice: “*The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts*” (1 Samuel 2:7), and “*The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all*” (Proverbs 22:2). The world, however, sees “choices in life” through the eyes of their own idolatry: “*Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made*” (Isaiah 2:8). According to the rich, the poor are just not taking the opportunities in life to worship correctly.

The choices in life, however, are not about upbringing, education, income level, financial planning, and business decisions, but in how much one *chooses* to believe Jesus. His time-frame about growing up to become someone includes eternity, and He is more concerned about the difficulties within a person than outside of a person.

Through their own riches, a rich person’s heart can suffer equally with a poor person’s heart, and the heart of a poor person can be far richer than the most wealthy. Depression, hatred, scorn, anger, bitterness, worry, mockery, insult, loneliness, illness, accidents, disease, or death are not beholden to the demarcations of economic status. Scripture teaches that everything not of faith is sin, and sin brings consequences and death.

Apart from sin, however, we have perfect fellowship with God, regardless of our external circumstances. In believing Jesus more and more so that our life is replaced by His life, many difficulties,

regardless of one's income level, evaporate either practically or spiritually. The difficulties that do remain, even to the point of death, fall under a believer's ability to be "content in all circumstances" so that the difficulties, themselves, are seen to be under God's guidance and provision. Thus, the very purpose of difficulties change from delivering death to delivering life. *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:7-11).*

Therefore, our judgments of other people's choices are only a judgment against our own choices as to how much we believe our Savior, Lord, and God.

In addition, Jesus taught that factors other than choice affect one's life, and that it is not for our judgment but that He alone will sort them out at His judgment seat. For instance, He stated that a blind man had been born blind, not because of his or his parent's choice to live an unrighteous life, but so that he could facilitate the glory of God (John 9).

Many have difficulty with this "will of God" because they see their lives as their own rather than as God's; that is, they believe that they were born to find happiness within themselves, not within Him. The blessings of this blind man, however, are immense in that his story has been told to the glory of God for over

2000 years to an unknown number of people, leading them to deeper faith. We can perhaps ask that man one day in the eternal presence of his Lord if he has any regrets about his 30-40 years of blindness. But at that time, the “why-God?” questions of this earth will have long been replaced with the “wow-God!” exclamations of His kingdom.

So it will be with countless others who were born with or became disabled in this life – physically, emotionally, mentally, or socially and who call upon the name of the Lord. *“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind’”* (John 9:39).

Furthermore, Jesus described people as being in bondage or enslaved by unrighteousness and by Satan. In enslavement, choice is not involved since a slave does not choose their slave master but a master chooses their slave. *“Therefore it says, ‘WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN’”* (Ephesians 4:8). Everyone either has been or is currently in the same boat of enslavement, and Jesus is the rescuer of both us and the people He calls us to love.

Similarly, Jesus also stated that people are “fathered” by Satan. *“Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me”* (John 8:43-45).

No matter how rich or poor, educated or uneducated, stable or unstable our families were, everyone was born and raised under “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” that belong to Satan (see Matthew 4:8-9). All have been born to parents who are not the incarnation of the Heavenly Father. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Nonetheless, God has cared for each family and provided all good things since the beginning. Since no one chooses their father, we are all as mere children of this world that need to be reborn as new children of our Heavenly Father and placed under His teaching, care, and protection. He is still wooing countless tender souls, whether parent or child from the “father of lies” and his kingdoms.

When Jesus hung on the cross, He “...*was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing’*” (Luke 23:34). In asking His Heavenly Father that His accusers and murderers be forgiven, He reveals a truth to us about the state of their souls, and ours, which is: “*they do not know what they are doing.*” Jesus knows that all people live in a state of deception, a process that begins from birth and continues throughout life. Only in hearing Jesus and doing the things He said can that deception begin to unravel.

It is not altogether undone when we are born again but starts there and continues as we obey Him throughout our lives. It is not the deception of doctrines such as not covering one’s head in church, or not knowing when the rapture is, or not knowing the best analogy of the trinity, or if pictures of Jesus constitute a graven image, or what the best way to do the sacraments is. It is in us becoming the love of God to

others and in how far that love will overcome the flesh so that our true hearts' desire will become just like His when we say, "*Father, forgive them...*"

Jesus alone is the judge of one's *choice* together with one's *heart-condition*, but it is our task to bring His *conditions* – His cross, His commandments, and His love into each person's *choice*.

The teachings of Jesus on our condition, however, are enough for us to make the choices to forego judgment, condemnation, indignation, disgust, exasperation, and, especially, the unforgiveness of others. Also, His teachings on our conditions are more than enough for us to see our child-like dependence on Him, to see His love for the world as love toward lost children rather than bad adults, and to see world events through His eyes.

A drug addict who could not win the fight and lies dying in a gutter can still cry out to Jesus, and Jesus will hear and deliver him into His arms. An impoverished child who was physically abused and mentally tortured into adulthood can find the peace and purpose of God. Furthermore, the simple choice of forgiveness by that grown-up child can restore the people who hurt her so that all will be alive in Jesus. Jesus said, "*If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained*" (John 20:23).

Within the particular rich or poor-, educated or undereducated-kingdom of Satan in which each person was raised, each person can be made whole and into a priest and minister of God. While part of our message to the world is that the season of God's judgment is fast approaching, the season of mercy through Jesus is still unquestionably in effect. Therefore, "*So speak and so*

*act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment”* (James 2:12-13).

## **The Foreigner Among You**

Another criteria that Jesus gives at His judgment for entering heaven or hell includes, *“I was a stranger, and you invited Me in”* (Matthew 25:35). God has always had a heart for the “foreigner among you,” the alien or marginalized of any nation. His commandments for Israel to love their neighbor always included provision for them, *“The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God* (Leviticus 19:34).

Israel, itself, has always been alienated by the world around them, Christians are considered aliens and strangers on this earth, Jesus and His earthly family were refugees in Egypt, and the Heavenly Father has always been marginalized by His own creation. Therefore, God refers to His own people as marginalized and commands them to be a place of refuge for others who are marginalized by this world.

Apart from the compassion of food, clothing, and hospitality associated with inviting in a stranger, those that take refuge among God’s true children also have the opportunity to learn about Jesus and then to be a witness of Him to their extended families and friends in their own land. It is an integral part of God’s large for us to be a “light to the nations” even while at home.

Today, Israel is still a prime example of a nation that is home to countless “foreigners,” even the enemies that surround them. This fact demonstrates that a nation can be called to love their neighbor while still having the authority, under the God they serve, to maintain law and order, and to have God protect them from within.

Similar to Israel, God has demonstrated this theme of hospitality and refuge to foreigners throughout history, even establishing a nation where people could find refuge, receive His mercy, and learn His ways. That nation was given His seal of approval, written by a Jew named Lazarus (the same name as the poor man who died at the rich man’s gate). That seal says, *“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”* Well before the “Land of Opportunity” there was first and foremost always a “Land of Refuge.”

Under this seal, Jesus’ judgments of *“I was a stranger and you invited Me in,”* will reflect His judgments of Lazarus being received into the arms of Abraham or the rich man descending into the fires of hell. To His true children He still says, *“So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear*

*by His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen” (Deuteronomy 10:16-21).*

In these days where strangers may be the enemies of Jesus disguised in some form of the anti-Christ (those of other religions, the godless, or the tares among the wheat within the church), hospitality and compassion for a stranger require hearing Jesus when He says, *“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:24).* No matter how loud the voices outside or inside the church are against God’s ways, we must not shy away from them, *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).*

Hearing Jesus and obeying Him takes courage and is not about political alignments. Politics and their branches are part of Satan’s “kingdoms of this world” and to place one’s hope in them is a major arena in which Satan continues to deceive the nations. No matter how different parts of God’s word are twisted within a particular branch of politics to facilitate the lusts and/or pride of men, every word God has uttered will ring true for all eternity and will be used to judge each person who has ever lived.

*“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now ‘IF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IS SCARCELY SAVED, WHERE WILL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?’ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him*

*in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:17-19, NKJV).*

Although Satan deceives the nations, God has authority over all politics for His purposes, through which He brings either prosperity or discipline to individuals, groups, or entire nations. No matter who is president, Jesus is King; no matter who is king, Jesus is the King of kings; and no matter who is emperor, Jesus is God.

## **Our Enemies**

The hardest people to consider in the question of “who is my neighbor” are our enemies. Yet, these are our neighbors whom we are to love – the very people who dislike, hate, slander, steal from, hurt, torment, and/or even kill us or those we love.

Jesus says, *“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and*

*you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men (Luke 6:27-35).*

Loving one's enemies is the most intense expression of Jesus through us. It represents the way God loves all people in this world, the people He gives life and provision to but who disregard or hate Him. We are commanded to do all of these things because God has done and is still doing all of these things for a world that hates Him.

There has never been a shortage of enemies to Jesus and the gospel. John wrote, *“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us”* (1 John 2:18-19, NKJV).

The enemies of Jesus always come out from the very crop that Jesus established – those who are against Him, His words, and His ways. Today, the deceptions of the spirit of the antichrist certainly fits with the “many antichrists” John describes as emerging from the body of believers to show themselves through hostile religions, atheism, or as tares among the wheat.

Today is no different; the religious antichrists attack Christians throughout the world, the godless antichrists attack Christians in countries that openly profess Jesus, and the tares-among-the-wheat antichrists attack Christians from within the body (*“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?”* Matthew 7:16).

Jesus, however, commands us to leave all of our enemies in place and to show love to them until His harvest: the end of this age and His judgment. At the national level, He has all power to raise up or bring down entire nations; at an individual level, He said, *“But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also”* (Matthew 5:39); and concerning the removal of tares from among the wheat, *“he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn’”*” (Matthew 13:29-30). We must believe and do all of these things, *“For we know Him who said, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE’”* (Hebrews 10:30, NKJV).

Therefore, loving our enemies has three purposes: 1) to express the most intense gospel and character of Jesus, 2) to not cause physical or spiritual harm to His true children who are in proximity, and 3) to leave room for the vengeance of God.

Hebrews chapter 11 gives us an incredible and graphic list of the heroic faithful who laid down their lives loving God and His enemies. Just part of it says, *“Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being*

*destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”* (Hebrews 11:35-38, NKJV). This level of faith expressed in this kind of suffering occurred before Jesus’ incarnation, was perfected in Him, and continues in His followers throughout the world.

Our enemies are not against the cross but against Jesus’ words, ways, and resurrection. They love the cross and delight in us bearing it so that we might die by it. Jesus, however, calls us to pick up our own crosses for our sake and for theirs. Our enemies are the enemies of God and His ways. They seek to persecute Him by persecuting His body, which is us. Persecution is done with the government turning a blind eye to it or by outright endorsement of it.

Many in the church, however, are against suffering for Jesus, and they find fault with it even at the biblical level. For example, many will point the finger at Rahab for lying to the guard about where the spies of Jericho were, or at David feigning madness to obtain shelter from Saul among a foreign people for himself and his men. This fault finding, however, is only a smoke screen that uses piety of the law to justify a self-seeking, lack of faith in laying down one’s life for God and others.

A brief consideration of this fault finding against those in the “Hall of Faith” is important, since the weighty choices they made will be similar to the choices that we must make under persecution; choices that will affect both us and others.

Jesus addressed this kind of fault finding against a life of faith when the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the law by healing on the Sabbath or when

they pointed fingers at His disciples for picking and eating the grain heads on a Sabbath. *“But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, “I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,” you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”*” (Matthew 12:2-8).

In this passage, the Pharisees used the outward piety of God’s laws to endorse the self-serving law of their hearts. Unlike the disciples who had left everything to follow Jesus, they had Sabbath food at home where they also had a place to lay their head each night. Concerning healing on the Sabbath, they were not so much worried about living a perfect Sabbath as they were about how Jesus’ work among the poor and broken convicted them for not doing the same.

Jesus said, *“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger”* (Matthew 23:4). They used the piety of the law to cover up their own failure in His law of love. The “sacrifice” of the law was used to hide the “sacrifice” of compassion.

Condemnation and compassion, however, are mutually exclusive. True piety is the love of God and one's neighbor through God's compassion that produces sacrifice. As Paul says, sacrifice that does not originate from love (or compassion) is "profitless" (1 Corinthians 13:3) and that, "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything*" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Love, accompanied by humility towards God in His judgment of our life, is what God's forgiveness and grace are for. Paul summed it up with, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load*" (Galatians 6:2-5, NKJV). God's forgiveness and grace are for Jesus living through us, who are imperfect, not for an easy get-out-of-jail-for-free card to live one's own life.

Persecution and the ability to love one's enemies is an incredibly intense expression of Jesus in us, and it is where "the rubber meets the road" in our Christian life. There will not be a greater time of confusion and disorientation in our lives than during persecution, and the only way of overcoming it all is to rally to our King. In this mindset, it is important to note that Jesus specifically addressed His teaching on loving one's enemies "*to those who hear*" (Luke 6:27).

Therefore, before we can follow His teachings we must seek from Him ears to hear. We must be able to "hear" Him in telling us to become like children to enter the kingdom of Heaven, we must hear Him in His

judgments of the religious rulers of His day and put ourselves under those same judgments, we must hear Him in the “good-tree” and “fruit-bearing” love that He classifies as how we really know of “eternal life” and “eternal security.”

The Christian life does not have to look pretty (it won't) and be perfectly implemented (it won't), but it will come forth from the desire to continuously hear and to follow Him until the end, and it will make us overcomers. We must hear His commandments and instructions throughout each day as we come against the difficulties of interacting with this world. We must hear His commandments in those difficulties whether we smoothly carry out our HSMS love for Him or whether we struggle, stumble, or fail in our HSMS love for Him.

In truly hearing Him, we have grace and victory whether we succeed or fail in our love for Him or for others. Both require that we humble ourselves, either in the success of loving or in the seeking forgiveness from God and from others for failure. Both bring peace and bear fruit. Do not quite “quitting” for more holiness and do not quite “doing” for more righteousness; do not quite believing in Jesus.

If, however, we are not hearing Him, than we are not even in the fight. *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27); *“But He answered and said to them, ‘My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it’”* (Luke 8:21).

But when we can hear, the ability to follow Jesus in these difficult teachings brings some of the highest opportunities for the Lord's glory to be expressed through us, and for us to reap the rewards of

it. *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:10-12). *“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him”* (Romans 8:16-17).

In this latter verse, being a child of God, an heir with Christ, and glorified with Christ are contingent upon us suffering with Him. Paul reiterates this to Timothy, *“If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us”* (2 Timothy 2:12), and *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7-8, NKJV).

These verses, together with our Lord’s letters to the seven churches in Revelation instructing us how to “overcome,” is just a sample of the Lord’s requirements and rewards to those with “ears to hear” and those who “loved His appearing.”

The persecuted church continues to be the persecuted body of our risen Lord, and that body is still lifted up as the light of the world, bringing sanctification to believers and eternal life to unbelievers: *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His*

*body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions” (Colossians 1:24). Here Paul puts suffering into an eternal perspective – for the sake of the church and to supplement Christ’s afflictions on earth. Jesus is still suffering for the world through His Spiritual body, the church.*

Paul further illustrates how the greatness and glory of God is displayed through our suffering and persecution, *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but*

*the things which are not seen are eternal*" (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).

Loving our enemies is the only true fulfillment of the hymn, *I Surrender All*<sup>4</sup> with the first lyrics being, "*All to Jesus I surrender; All to Him I freely give.*" Apart from obedience of His command to love our enemies, a genuine comprehension of "surrender all" may be lacking.

Loving one's enemies may seem like the darkest place to be, but it is where His most intense light is. That is why we can, in love, seem to lose everything to that darkness but, in reality, we lose nothing and gain everything. This was beautifully summarized by Jim Elliot, a famous missionary killed following His Lord, as "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."<sup>5</sup>

In relation to loving our enemies, we are also instructed to not resist an evil person, "*But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also*" (Matthew 5:39). God commands this of us because He does not need to "resist" evil since He has all authority over it. He permits it, ends it, and judges it according to His timing and purpose. It is simply the manure He uses to fertilize His great fields of souls before they are harvested into His kingdom forever. On God's timescale, evil is used only for a season, and Satan is allowed his hour within God's eternity.

Lucifer and the entire heavenly host were created in God's pure light with every blessing of their

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<sup>4</sup> J. W. Van de Venter, 1855-1939; Winfield S. Weeden, 1847-1908.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1958).

Heavenly Father. They saw everything and had everything; no faith was required. Yet from within that very light a third of them desired the darkness of independence, pride, and power, and they were subsequently cast out. On earth, however, the tables are turned. People are born into a world of darkness, orchestrated by the evil that was cast here, and everyone experiences the blindness of that darkness.

Yet each of us, by seeing, living, and finally acknowledging the evil of this darkness that surrounds us and is within ourselves, we have the opportunity to see, through faith, what God's pure light with every blessing is. And rather than myriads of angels being cast down from God's kingdom long ago, the promise is made that myriads of souls will be lifted up to it. Thus, whatever level of darkness seems to surround us, there is no need to resist those who are in that darkness. Jesus has all authority over them whether they know it or not.

An acknowledgement of being born into that darkness also requires a constant recognition that the Savior saved us from it. Therefore, we must see and treat the most evil people as those who will be eventually saved, and as those who will eventually be our brother or sister in Christ. From our own experience at having "become like children," we can know that those not in the Lord are only small children who have been deceived, blinded, and enslaved by the enemy.

The phrase "hate the sin but love the sinner" must go to a whole new level were we need not even regard the sin as our heart breaks for the child who is enslaved by it. 1 Corinthians 13 says that love "*does not take into account a wrong suffered*" (v5), and that love "*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all*

*things, endures all things*” (v7). In the face of Jesus, sin is not even regarded, let alone hated. The overwhelming innocence and longing of love drowns out the powerless face of evil. “*Mercy triumphs over judgment,*” and “*love never fails*” (James 2:13, 1 Corinthians 13:8).

Only in this way can the most deluded atheist, serial killer, school shooter, or terrorist be seen as a small child who has been whipped and torn their entire lives by God’s enemy. Through the power and love of Jesus, however, they can be rescued, restored, and made whole. Like it or not, this is the plan and it is laid out before us and the entire world.

We have hope, also, in the promise of its completion, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying* (Isaiah 65:17-19).

In contrast to that hope, the world sees things on a temporal scale and would have us believe that justice, rather than mercy, is the rule for all people. In the guise of their own authority, they redefine the law apart from God’s ways, redefine mercy according to their new law, and become the judge and executioners of that “mercy.”

We, however, follow Jesus on an eternal scale where His season of mercy precedes His season of justice, and both are defined by His words. We are the proclaimers of His eternal justice and enactors of His eternal mercy. His impartial, eternal justice will be

exacted to everyone, both believer and unbeliever, by His absolute authority. In the end, Jesus will sort out the heart, intent, and actions of every person for judgment or for reward (2 Corinthians 5:10). Therefore we are told, *“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord. ‘BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:19-21).

Through His love and healing of demon-possessed people, the Lord revealed to us the reality of *“...the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12) in our day-to-day lives. Demonic influences, both within and external to a person, is the “norm” that we must not forget. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12).

The weapons we use in this fight are not the weapons of the world that can physically hurt or oppress anyone. Rather, they are weapons that have an impact on the spiritual forces around us. Focusing our fight on the source of evil will deliver those in bondage to it, freeing those who will in turn bless countless others. Evil is only fought and won through God, not through this world. We are part of this good fight and we carry all of His weapons of His spiritual warfare; weapons which are the opposite that the world carries.

Governments give authority, which is theirs to give, for war or personal defense. But in every action

that we take upon another, the spiritual battle begins with our ability to see the enemy as evil or to see the evil behind them; with our desire to destroy the slave or destroy the master who enslaves them; with our goal to use the weapons of this world or the weapons of our Lord; or with our yearning to take someone else's life or to lay down our lives for them.

The weapons of the world are well documented and are associated with strength and courage. Our weapons from the Lord, however, require even more strength and courage, and are the weapons of love: humility, forgiveness, witness, prayer, support, and in simply providing a word of blessing rather than a curse.

In the kingdom of God, the best defense is a good offense and there is no better offense than the way of Jesus. People of the world are at liberty to defend themselves as their government allows; but those seeking the kingdom of Heaven are bound to trust in God's defense knowing that, similar to Jesus, legions of angels are at our disposal. *"Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:52-53). No matter what the outcome, the safest place for us, our families, and those the Lord brings in our path is to live within His will. In Him, the gates of hell will not prevail.

Although loving your enemies in the way of Jesus may sound like valiant soldiers of God ready to do battle with His enemies, fighting with the weapons of His love will be laughable to those enemies and the world. And to our loved ones and neighbors who seek our protection, it may be taken as outright betrayal.

Loving one's enemies will not likely appear helpful to anyone except the enemy. Because following Jesus during any type of potentially bloody conflict does not entail the weapons of this world but spiritual weapons, it can result in the loss of support from family and friends and, "*A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD*" (Matthew 10:36). The act of "loving our enemies" may be seen as a time of intense betrayal that results in our isolation.

But this is also part of following Jesus. "*Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, "I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED"'"*" (Matthew 26:31). Furthermore, He called out the true hearts of His disciples stating that He would be "numbered with transgressors," namely, them. "*And He said to them, 'But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, "AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS;"*" for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment. They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough'" (Luke 22:36-38). After three years of witnessing His humility, love, and mercy to the world, they were still more excited to start the process of justice rather than to continue His process of mercy.

Jesus gave us an oft quoted promise of peace in Him, "*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33), but we fail to recognize that this promise came just after addressing His disciples' superficial belief in

Him: “*Jesus answered them, ‘Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me’*” (John 16:31-32).

Similarly, Paul wrote to Timothy of abandonment saying, “*At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen*” (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

In short, loving our enemies is an intensely bright testimony to all around us, either friend or foe; but that testimony may also bring enormous rejection. It may well look like the loss of everything, but it is just the beginning of fruit that will be shared by everyone. Again, the will of God is always the safest place for the one testifying and for those receiving that testimony.

We are at liberty, however, to sell our coat and buy a sword, but it will only amount to disaster compared to using, “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17). This latter sword is often referred to as the only offensive weapon in the armor of God. Jesus and His words are the living word of God and the pure blade because, “*From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations...*” (Revelation 19:15). From His mouth comes the blade and it has no hilt. He, Himself, is the hilt. As we cling to Him – His Way, Truth, and Life – than we have and use His sword. The church,

however, has a long history of making its own hilt based on the different types of “knowledge” in how they are connected to God, and they continually hit each other over the head using their different hilts.

But in clinging to Jesus, His word’s and example, we will always be targeting the real enemy – not those in the church or even those in the world – but the powers, the world forces of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). In addition, our battle will not be in swinging the sword, but in the faith to believe Him and work His deeds during the darkest times. It is a simple thing, in the most adverse circumstance, to confess Jesus and witness of what He has done for us, together with whatever words the Spirit gives us during the battle. The scriptures given, however, are unlikely to pertain to predestination, free will, spiritual gifts, church administration, or infant baptisms. Indeed, a witness of the power that Jesus has had in our lives is indisputable and just talking about Jesus will cause the listeners to either withdraw or stay to hear more.

Some *defensive* armaments that God has given us also have an *offensive* capacity. For instance, we have been given the “breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14), that is, the good works of Jesus that live through us to this world. A breastplate acts as a close-contact barrier against enemies, similar to how the walls of a castle act as close-contact barriers against armies; the enemies are temporarily immobilized at that position. Enemies retained at the wall, however, make them targets from above, to pour down all manner of horrible things onto them. In like manner, this works for the breastplate of righteousness, where the “horrible things” poured down are expressed in the

verse, “*BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:20-21).

In addition to the “breastplate of righteousness,” the “shield of faith” can also be used offensively. Although its main use is “*to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*” (Ephesians 6:16), it can also be used to hit and stun the enemy, causing some level of disorientation.

This alternative use of the shield of faith in times of crisis is seen throughout the Bible, including David masquerading as a madman to gain protection from Saul and in Rahab lying to the guards at Jericho. In faith, both laid down their lives for God, and similarly, the laying down of our lives for God will bring choices that will affect both us and others and we will not always know the “right” thing to do.

More modern examples include many European Christians who laid down their lives for God to help Jews escape from many other “European Christians” during World War II. In the same way, countless followers of Jesus have entered Christian-hostile nations with Christ’s love and ministry.

In laying down our lives with humility and love for others, and in always seeking His wisdom, we have the grace to make those choices in brokenness and without boasting that we fulfill the word of God. Jesus is the only perfect fulfillment of His word. Again, Jesus said of these choices, “*Something greater than the temple is here.*”

We, like Jacob of the Old Testament, are given the opportunity of learning to strive with both God and

man. This is not done in the self-righteous judgments of piety, but in the righteousness of Jesus bathed in humility, brokenness, the fear of God, and ultimately a true love for God and our neighbor. In our life with God, Jesus is more than willing for each of us to strive with Him. And like Jacob, we are called to wrestle with Him by seeking Him and being yoked to Him throughout our lives; to learn that we are not the truth, but that He alone is the truth. And “*HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH*” (Ephesians 6:14), we are perpetually disjointed in ourselves to become forever blessed in Him and to someday receive a new name from Him (Revelation 2:17). And like Jacob, we will eventually hear Him say, “*for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed*” (Genesis 32:28).

Chapter 13

**HOW WE ARE TO LOVE**

**By the Spirit of the Law**

The Bible is replete with specific commandments on how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. These are not suggested life-style choices, inspirational ways of living, or good philosophies. They are commandments to obey with promises of blessing for obedience and consequences for disobedience. They represent the place where the Lord lives and the food that we eat with Him on a daily basis.

Whether in the Old or New Testament, they are His words and His life. The Old Testament provided a plethora of commandments for situations and outcomes where both the Lord's mercy and judgment were jointly displayed by the letter of His law, while the New Testament consolidates these same ordinances into the spirit, rather than the letter of the law (*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law"* Galatians 5:22-23, NKJV). Faith has been considered true righteousness since the beginning, but true faith is always expressed through the body, originating from the heart, according to the spirit of the law.

Similar to Israel's exodus from Egypt that began the old covenant set according to the letter of the law, Jesus, through His forgiveness of sins, His words, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, begins the new covenant that is set according to the spirit of the law.

Jesus said, *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:17-20).

Jesus is the righteousness of God in us, not as Jesus-the-covering that God sees when He sees us, but as Jesus-the-living-God Who lives through us. God does not cover up dead people to *look* good but makes dead people alive who *are* good. He said, *“...for apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

From His statement on the law and the prophets, above, our Lord goes on to describe how different aspects of the letter of the law must be fulfilled by the spirit of the law via interpretation of our heart rather than our flesh. Likewise, Paul, in all of his writings on God's law and grace, spoke of differences between the law and grace without negating the intent of God's righteousness to live through us via His grace: *“Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law”* (Romans 3:31), and *“What shall we say then? Is the*

*Law sin? May it never be!*” (Romans 7:7). Rather, he contrasted the failure of the letter to achieve the righteousness of the Spirit; that is, Jesus living from within us. After writing his longest discourses on the mysteries of the law and grace in his letter to the Romans, Paul caps his discussion with four chapters (Romans 12-15) on the righteousness of God that is expected in those who are saved by that grace.

Today there is a great stumbling block among evangelicals towards the law of God and Jesus’ commandments on how we are to live. We have been taught that Christ freed us from rules, regulations, and judgments – that we are under grace not works, that His work is a finished work, and that we are to rest in it.

This, unfortunately, has thrown out the baby with the bathwater. The baby of God’s righteousness through us has been thrown out with the bathwater of God’s grace to us. It is certain that the work required for God to lavish His forgiveness through the precious blood of His son on any who would seek it is certainly a finished work. But God, Himself, has never stopped working; and as His true children, we are expected to join Him. Jesus said, *“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working”* (John 5:17) and *“We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work”* (John 9:4).

Even the law was never given as just a list of ordinances by which God the Father will judge us or save us from. It was given as the only way to have a relationship with Him. It was saturated in love and desire for His children to be close to Him, to be where He lived, even here on earth. In this world, we know that no one has a genuine, intimate relationship with a spouse or child based on lists of duties, rules, and

regulations; but all of those things, in the guise of boundaries, expectations, and livelihood are part of a loving relationship. One should not work to be loved, but work comes forth from love, and one that does not love does not work. In addition, two who strive together share an intimacy unknown to two who strive apart. Those who wish to be near God see His commandments as a law of life, and those who do not wish to be near God see them as a law of death.

Because of this works-grace stumbling block, we cannot *hear* Jesus' words since they are given to us as commandments containing judgments and conditions. For instance, He said, "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*" (John 14:15).

His commandments are His words, recorded from the three-plus year ministry that the living God used to directly teach us and show us how to live. As mentioned above, His commandments include such things as how to humble ourselves, forgive others, show mercy, witness of Him, consider others more important, deny our covetous hearts, give selflessly to others, live in meekness, be peacemakers, endure maltreatment, and give Him everything we have, not just 10%.

Compared with the works expected under the *spirit of the law* (e.g. faith), the works of the *letter of the law* are like preschool. Accordingly, the purpose, healing, outcome, power, blessings, and eternal rewards are not even comparable. His complete gift to us is "grace for works" rather than "grace not works."

This stumbling block of "grace not works," however, is rooted in the mind and heart of our natural selves by a greater desire that we must be always vigilant against. It is our desire to "...*be like God,*

*knowing good and evil*” (Genesis 3:5). This was Satan’s sin that started it all, and it continues to lead us to the sin of disobeying or ignoring Him.

Desiring to be like God is not a sin, and that is what He wants; He wants His character and conduct to shine uninhibitedly through His children. Rather, it is a god-like satisfaction that we have within ourselves when we obtain a knowledge that distinguishes good from evil, or right from wrong. It is the pride that originates from “knowing” His word. Rather than His word putting us in our place and directing our lives, we use the knowledge to elevate ourselves above others and satisfy our minds that God must be pleased with us.

The beginning and end of Eve’s sin in the garden was to first question God’s word and then desire to become wise in it. Similarly, we also become wise about God’s word, we know the truth, other’s don’t, and that’s enough. Whether it was like the Pharisees who boasted in their knowledge of the law or Christians who “know the truth” of enough church doctrines (such as “grace not works”), we know it, claim it, and rest in it. From this perceived accumulation of knowledge we can have our sins forgiven, have some church fellowship, make some money, enjoy some comforts, give some money, and shake our heads or wag our fingers at others while we settle back and wait for Jesus.

A good understanding of the “propitiation of sins” and a little knowledge of grace has simply become more bites from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is only through taking the yoke of Jesus, however, where we can truly *find rest for our souls*, and this is the tree of life, not the tree of knowledge. Jesus does not say, “If you love Me, you

will believe certain doctrines” but rather, *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”* (John 14:15).

Under the tree of knowledge, any doctrines of God’s word can become the letter of the law fulfilled in pride rather than the spirit of the law fulfilled in the humility of one’s heart to God and their neighbor.

There is nothing wrong with knowledge, however, except in the priority we give it. It has an order. The love or fear of Jesus produces obedience to Him which produces more love for Him and more knowledge of Him. Keeping rather than knowing, doing rather than dissecting, applying rather than acknowledging His commandments produces an intimate knowledge of Him. It produces a relationship permeating into our deepest selves. As Paul wrote, *“...Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him (1 Corinthians 8:1-3), “and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God”* (Ephesians 3:19).

Again, within this equation is the fear of God. As mentioned above, there is nothing to fear except a lack of fear for Him. The fear of God supplements our imperfect love for Jesus and is the stepping stone that raises us up, away from temptation and self-importance, to discover both His love for us and our opportunities to love Him. Fear is only for a season and it does its job perfectly.

Only by the spirit of the law can we obey Jesus’ many commandments and teachings to us. These teachings encompass every situation we face with whatever ability we have. Only by the spirit of the law,

rather than its letter can we forgive seven times seventy, be merciful to receive mercy, be a good Samaritan, beware of every form of covetousness, judge not, condemn not, serve God rather than money, consider others more important, teach others all that He has commanded us, and loose our lives that we should find them. Only by the spirit of the law can we comprehend our deep lack of faith in Him (which is sin) and His constant washing of grace over us. Only by the spirit of the law can we see the spirituality that surrounds us and the constant battles that exist. Only by the spirit of the law can we value the poverty and suffering in this world as things which can separate and sanctify people from the world's foundations of greed and pride. Only by the spirit of the law can we become like children and see others as children. Only by the spirit of the law can we look upon our enemies with child-like love, knowing that our Heavenly Father is above all and can deliver all.

According to Jesus, His free gift of eternal life (if we are willing) includes salvation from our sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, His commandments, the grace and power to fulfill them, and a custom-made stage for each of us to display Him to the world. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

Accepting Jesus' payment for our sins without continuing to seek the good works He has for us is not true repentance and salvation. All of what He has for us is a gift, all is within reach, and all will bring His healing, joy, peace, and the fulfilment of life that each of us desires so much. He is the tree of life that we are to eat from.

Instead of burdensome and impossible to fulfill, obedience to Jesus' commandments become the very thing that revives us and brings us healing and growth. For instance, obeying the commandment to forgive others who have deeply hurt us can be seen as either impossible or incredibly burdensome. But to those who have obeyed, they see healing and peace within. Likewise, those who see the commandments to show mercy toward the "least of these" as a waste of resources, or to "not resist an evil person" as a loss of self-preservation will never understand God's power to provide indefinitely or to experience His love that flows through themselves to others. In contrast, everyone who believes that Jesus' commandments are not an option, but are a continuation of eternal life emerging from His cross to ours, will see how His yoke is the gate that makes all of God's promises and power come alive.

They will also see that Jesus' commandments are a life-long path in the spiritual war we face both within and without; that they are daily struggles which are always victorious. Following Him means faithfulness in the small things of each day, since "*...Each day has enough trouble of its own*" (Matthew 6:34).

For instance, it is a blessing to spend a Saturday bringing His mercy to others, but a battle on Monday to humble ourselves and trust in God's provision for the things left undone. It is a blessing to show love to our neighbors, but a battle for humility, patience, and love when those closer to us may be jealous of it – or when we, ourselves are jealous of those close to us serving others. It is a blessing to give to others, but a battle to trust that the Lord will bear fruit from it when the gifts

seem wasted, misused, mocked, or even thrown back in our face. Through these battles, though, we see His promise fulfilled, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”* (John 14:27). As the cross gets heavier, the burden gets lighter in the presence of Jesus.

As food, water, and breath are not rules to be followed but requirements for natural life, Jesus’ commandments are not rules to be followed but requirements of spiritual life – our obedience to His word is to stay alive by His word; it feeds our spirits, souls, and bodies. *“It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD’”* (Matthew 4:4). Living in Jesus’ commandments is to drink of His living water and eat of His bread of life.

Over the years many have called for revival in the church and yet Jesus told us what revival is. *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work”* (John 4:34). Just as food revives us from hunger and weariness, Jesus was revived when He did *“the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”* Our revival, individually or collectively, will only come in the same way. All historic church revivals have one thing in common – people fell back asleep soon afterwards. In contrast, Jesus taught us that His daily food (His daily revival) is to do the will and accomplish the work of His Heavenly Father. It is *“the food which endures to eternal life”* (John 6:27) and it is the only thing we are given to eat whether we are in a quick church revival or a long church slumber party.

Finally, the spirit of the law guides both the outward conduct and inward character of those who hear the words of Jesus. Faith is the driving force on the narrow path He spoke of, and His blood continually cleanses us from meandering outside of it – all of our weaknesses, imperfections, and stumbling.

God's conduct and character are the two legs that we use to walk the narrow path; both are necessary, and one continually supports and strengthens the other. For instance, our willful conduct will bring about the character of our Lord – His humility, forgiveness, peace, and compassion. There is a famous story about Corrie ten Boom who, after giving a message on the requirement of forgiveness, met a former prison guard who had caused her much suffering. Although he was repentant and sought her forgiveness, there was anything but forgiveness in her heart (her *character*) until she willfully *conducted* her hand to shake his.<sup>6</sup> At that point, the *character* of God flowed through her to him and both knew that “*the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7).

The reverse works the same way; the seeking of God's character will lead to the output of conduct. Although Peter denied Jesus on the night of His arrest (poor conduct), Peter's desire for the true character of his Lord caused him to weep bitterly and eventually recover toward much greater faith. In contrast, Judas had no desire for conduct or character and the result was his death. In addition, when many disciples brought their possessions to Peter and the church for

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<sup>6</sup> Corrie Ten Boom and Jamie Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord*. (The Penguin Group, New York, NY., 1974)

distribution, Ananias and Sapphira brought theirs in conduct which lacked character, and the result was their deaths (Acts 5:1-11). Finally, Paul wrote that he delivered over an immoral Corinthian believer to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit might be saved. The believer, however, feared God (character), desired His conduct, and repented.

The legs of conduct and character support each other and they are how we “*Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*” (Galatians 5:16, NKJV) and how we “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*” (Ephesians 4:1).

### **With God’s Character**

***Love Defined.*** God, through Paul, provides us with a beautiful and comprehensive description on the “character” with which we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Paul prefaces this description on the “character” of love with the “conduct” of love, “*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I*

*give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

These are acts of conduct that Paul, himself, performed: speaking in tongues, prophesying, relating mysteries and knowledge, giving one's possessions to the poor, or laying down one's life in persecution. These acts of conduct are those things we speak and do outwardly for God and our neighbor, and they are the works that God has prepared for us to do.

Together, the character of God's love with the conduct of God's good works are woven into the fine linen that will clothe us for the marriage feast of the Lamb. As mentioned above, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:7-8).

Jesus gave stern warnings about these clothes, *"Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame"* (Revelation 16:15), and *"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matthew 22:11-14).

The description of love's character is given to us so that we can judge if it is present or lacking within

ourselves as we serve the Lord and others. We cannot superficially read the passage and consider it to be just lovely or idealistic.

Although it is nice to read at wedding ceremonies, it must be a constant reminder of our own impending marriage feast. This summation of love is the bar of character by which the Spirit of God lives through us. This description of love does not define a romantic dinner, but a fight between our spirit and flesh to have it genuinely expressed within our hearts. Although the passage is poetic, the battle to keep it expressed never looks that way; it must be sought after and fought for. Paul says, "*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses*" (1 Timothy 6:12, NKJV).

There will be plenty of mistakes in achieving the fullness of this love, but even the mistakes will produce a thirst to fulfill it – a greater desire to see that kind of love in our hearts. We, of course, are not the source of that love, but only the tap that lets it flow. A mistake which turns it off is fine as long as it produces a dryness and thirst that will let it reopen. "*Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life'*" (John 4:13-14).

Positive and negative contrasts are frequently used by our Lord and His writers to emphasize and illustrate His teachings. This I Corinthians 13 passage on love is no exception. Within this description, there are seven descriptions of what love is and nine descriptions of what love is not. Collectively, *love is*

## Hearing Jesus

patient and kind; rejoices in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Collectively, *love is not* jealous, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, and does not fail. Each description is perfect and the only embellishment that they need is to be expressed by us. They should be memorized and kept as a standard during every interaction with others.

## How We Are to Love

Love is:

<b>Love is</b>	<b>Thesaurus</b>
Patient	Tolerant, long-suffering, serene, forbearing, understanding
Kind	Caring, sympathetic, generous, gentle, compassionate, considerate
Rejoices in truth	Celebrates, cheers, exults, delights in fact, reality, actuality
Bears all things	Stands, stomachs, accepts, allows, suffers all things
Believes all things	Trusts, has faith in, certain of, accepts all things
Hopes all things	Confidence, expectation, optimism, anticipation, courage in all things
Endures all things	Lasts, continues, persists, survives, perseveres, prevails in all things

Love is not:

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<b>Love is not</b>	<b>Thesaurus</b>
Not jealous	Not envious, covetous, resentful, desirous, or bitter
Does not brag	Does not blow one's own horn, sing own praise, show off, or talk big
Not arrogant	Not conceited, haughty, egotistical, superior, or condescending
Not unbecoming	Not improper, inappropriate, unflattering, indecent, or indelicate
Not seek its own	Not selfish, self-centered, self-seeking, or greedy
Not provoked	Not baited, goaded, annoyed, irritated, angered, or frustrated
No account of wrong	No score, count, reckoning, or record of a wrong
No rejoicing in unrighteousness	Does not celebrate, cheer, exult, or delight in a lack of virtue, morality, goodness, decency, uprightness, honesty, or justice
Does not fail	Does not miss the mark, give up, disappoint, forsake, let down, go under, or fall short

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During persecution, evil will laugh at this kind of non-resistant, childlike love and believe that it has the upper hand. Yet, through this same love that started with Jesus and continues through us (His body), the perfect power of God's indictment of Satan is fulfilled, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"* (Genesis 3:15, NIV). In Jesus living through us, we are the body, leg, and foot which continue to crush Satan's head.

This type of love is the heart and power of what Jesus commanded to those who could hear Him, *"...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back"* (Luke 6:27-30); and what Paul wrote, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21); and what Peter wrote, *"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing"* (1 Peter 3:8-9, NKJV).

***Innocent as Doves.*** Love "rejoices in the truth" and since Jesus is truth, we rejoice in all things that are of Jesus. Similarly, we can "believe all things" in love, just as innocent children see the world or as "innocent as doves" that Jesus described.

This can be done because 1) “...*Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’*” (Matthew 28:18) and, 2) “*To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled*” (Titus 1:15). No matter how evil or perverse, there is no situation that is outside the domain of Jesus. His Spirit continues to strive with people (Genesis 6:3), and He is the giver and sustainer of all life.

Also, no matter how far a person seems distant from Jesus, the simplest, smallest faith can emerge from the milieu of their deception to a new life in their Creator. The farther gone a person seems, the closer Jesus may be to snatch them back. Again, the darkness of deception only makes the light of Jesus that much brighter, and our ability to simply point to Jesus in word or deed is all that is necessary.

Paul is a wonderful role model in the ability to “hope all things” and “believe all things” with a child-like perspective in any circumstance or against any evil. This is of whom Jesus said, “*for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake*” (Acts 9:16).

In one such instance, “*Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them*” (Acts 16:22-25, NKJV).

Likewise, we are admonished to seek and do the same things within the circumstances that the Lord leads each of us: *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things”* (Philippians 4:8), *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”* (Philippians 4:4), *“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and *“be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ”* (Ephesians 5:19-21).

***Wise as Serpents.*** To love our neighbor as ourselves, we must first set our mind on spiritual things, not with the deceptions of this world that are channeled through media and entertainment, and which are rife with personal justice, greed, adultery, immorality, envy, and covetousness. We must direct our minds constantly to the Lord, seeking to fulfill His word and His kingdom in our lives.

In addition to the dissipation of media and entertainment, most people are focused on the “worries of this world,” or on how to maintain or advance “their” lives through careers and family; *“...but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19).

Therefore, the same way one plans, strategizes, and reflects on careers and family is to become the mindset of seeking His kingdom in and around us. Do we often think about our finances and assets in relation to our employer and families? Then we are to consider them even more spiritually in relation to our God and neighbors. We must be always planning and strategizing on how to advance Jesus and His kingdom to those around us through His word, His deeds, and through rectifying our own mistakes or shortcomings.

While still providing for and loving our families, He has all the internal and external resources (e.g. the overhead) we need to be about our Father's business (Luke 2:49 NKJV). Jesus commanded us, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, 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 that is 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 one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth"* (Matthew 6:19-24).

This concept of directing our eyes and hearts on either the treasures of this life or His life is further elaborated on by Jesus in His parable of the dinner invitation, *"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me*

*excused.’ Another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.’ Another one said, ‘I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come’”* (Luke 14:18-20). The excuses made by these people do not address adherence to different doctrinal beliefs among denominations but commitments to time, money, and family over a commitment to serving God. It is essential to note that the invitation (the calling) did not require them to abandon these things (that the Lord gave them in the first place), but to accept the invitation and prepare themselves (in addition to those things) to come to His dinner (wedding feast of the Lamb).

Again, He illustrates this point to His disciples when He compares serving God amidst tending to our lives in this world, *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’”* (Luke 17:7-10, NKJV).

Careers and family are from the Lord but we work at them as for the Lord, not for ourselves, and they by no means negate direct service to Him during our time off in which we attend prayer meetings, Bible studies, call or visit those who need encouragement, host dinners for the lowly and isolated, serve at soup kitchens, and/or prepare for and attend community

outreaches. We are not to consider these great efforts or sacrifices because the Holy Spirit has striven with us since birth, provided all good things in our lives, delivered us into His kingdom, and will continue to work in and around us beyond what we can comprehend. We become like servants and slaves because He first became like a servant and slave for us.

**Compassion.** We are told many times in the gospels that Jesus felt compassion for the individuals and the crowds around Him, and that twice that He wept, once at Lazarus' death and again for all of Jerusalem (John 11:35, Luke 19:41). Likewise, we must have this compassion for others within ourselves.

Compassion is the character of holiness essential in any attempt at loving our neighbor as ourselves. It moves us to act and drives us to continue to act. We must see the suffering around us and be moved to provide the relief of Jesus, in both word and deed. It is not a relief that will cover the entire lives of others, but a relief that will provide a blessing for some duration and which will point people to our Savior and Lord Who will provide His eternal relief and blessing.

In loving our neighbor, Jesus gave us a scale of compassion that is to be expressed in the largest way by loving our enemies, and in the smallest way by greeting our neighbor: *"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love*

*those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48, NKJV).*

Part of compassion is mournfulness over the inevitability of sin and its consequences. In both instances, Jesus wept because of the people’s lack of faith in Him and its impending consequences, “*saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes’” (Luke 19:42).*

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and everything that is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). If anything short of perfect faith is sin (which it is), then there is a lot of sin and potential death both around us and within us. And that is fine – as long as our appreciation of God’s amazing grace grows from that daily recognition of how much we are forgiven (because those forgiven much love much – Luke 7:47). But oscillating with the appreciation of forgiveness is the mournfulness of it, which keeps humility in ourselves and elicits compassion for others.

Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4), and “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matthew 9:15).* Paul said against the Corinthian church with the immoral believer, “*You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst” (1*

Corinthians 5:2). James exhorts, “*Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you*” (James 4:9-10).

Because sin is death and because we mourn death, we must mourn the sin within ourselves and within others. We and others exist in decaying bodies that plod through a fallen world. This is the curse that somehow still exists amidst the hope and forgiveness of His heavenly kingdom. All of the people that Jesus forgave and healed still suffered and died later. Jesus wept for His friend Lazarus and those who loved Him even though Lazarus would be raised to life only to die again, and He wept for Jerusalem and the future that He saw for His chosen people even though they would be reconciled back to Him one day.

It is a mystery of hope and sadness that we must embrace until that day, “*When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all*” (1 Corinthians 15:28). This mournfulness does not displace the hope and assurance that God will make us and all things new, and it does not negate the peace and joy that God brings to those who seek Him. Rather, it is tied to our own lack of faith and to the compassion needed to further the kingdom of God into the dying world around us.

***Humility.*** Humility is perhaps one of the most important characters of godliness necessary for our HSMS love of God and the love of our neighbor as ourselves. It is a constant necessity in the spiritual warfare that we engage in each day, and throughout the

day. It makes a clear path of following Jesus. We are children of a gentle and humble God (Matthew 11:29) Who, Himself, is the ultimate “enabler” of a world that never ceases to demand their “entitlement” of everything that does not belong to them. We have a Father who sent His perfect, sinless, and precious Son to be a ransom for those who could not care less about Him. We have a Teacher Who patiently reminds us and shows us the way to live, day after day and year after year, and constantly cleans up after our mistakes.

Thus, humility is perhaps the most maligned and twisted principle of God taught in churches today. Whatever whisper of real humility that is actually taught, it is drowned out by shouts of “don’t beat yourself up,” “don’t be so hard on yourself,” “you need to take care of yourself, first,” “you matter the most,” “you’ve got to forgive yourself,” and “you’re so humble that you’re proud.”

We have become a generation of humble iChristians rather than humbled HeChristians. It’s about *us* first. Jesus is not even second, He’s simply the doormat where we wipe the sin from our feet and the nurse-maid of our lives who we keep pushing the call button for. Humility found within the church today is more like self-idolatrous victimhood than “here I am, Lord, use me.” The church is a “hospital for sinners,” not a war room of mended people who come to meet with their Leader and plan His advance.

Within the church, Jesus no longer says, “...*get up, take up your pallet and walk*” (Mark 2:9), but watches the crippled of this world lowered down from the ceiling, takes their hand, and tells them how much God loves them, how the world has wronged them, that they are the most important person, and please come to

our Bible Study to hear more of the same. We have become a church with self-serving rather than God-serving humility.

Humility, however, is related to three things that are spoken against by both the world and the church: guilt, shame, and fear. Like fear, guilt and shame are additional stepping stones that bring us to humility and move us up, away from ourselves and this world into the light of Jesus. They are not the evil things taught by the world and the church over the past 50 years; rather, they have their time and place in initiating, restoring, and maintaining intimacy with our Lord.

They work together in recognizing and turning away from sin, or even when all seems right in our walk with the Lord. Again, *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us”* (1 John 1:8-10).

Guilt, shame and fear leading to humility play a major role if we have wandered from Him, and a lesser role when we walk in His love and blessings as they guard against conceit, self-righteousness, and lethargy. They need to be on the front burner when we see sin in our lives or when we have displaced Jesus with our own lives. They can, however, be relocated to the back burner (but not removed) when we are walking in the strength and blessing of Him. Although we are compelled by the love of God, they act as safety nets to keep us on His paths of righteousness.

The world and the church have confused guilt, shame, and fear with the narcissistic self-pity that many people wallow in today, having deceived themselves that they gain attention or justification through them.

The guilt, shame, and fear that occur in reaching for the Lord through His words and deeds, however, are the true initiation points of healing and restoration. If we have these things while not reaching for Him, we become like fish out of water flopping about on the stepping stones, thinking that all the air has been turned off and that we will eventually die. But Jesus is still saying, “get up, take up your pallet and walk” and “follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” (see Mark 2:9, 14).

Those going through depression, loss, or substance abuse still have the option, in their weakest states, to hear and follow Jesus. They do not have to start international ministries, but they do need to forgive those who have hurt them, reconcile with those they can, greet their neighbors, and bless rather than curse others. The healing and strength gained from this foundational obedience will only grow with time toward more opportunities of faithfulness that impacts this world. Multitudes who have discovered this narrow path have become great lights to their immediate worlds, with some going on to start international ministries.

There is nothing wrong with expressing the compassion of a Good Samaritan or with still lowering our disabled friends to Jesus from the roof except when it replaces the forgiveness, healing, commandments, power, and Lordship of Jesus. When this happens, compassion becomes part of the “angel of light,” rather

than the power of the Gospel to transform a person into a new creation.

Attempts to rectify or smooth over our life in this world are always a disaster, but seeking His life is always victorious. Jesus and His medicinal commandments must become the only sufficiency for our insufficiency.

For instance, it is a fact that our own sins and the sins of this world (from which we seek approval but receive only disapproval or disappointment) do hurt us severely over the years. Long-term Christian counseling, however, on how you must find yourself now that Jesus has found you will never outdo the overnight success of recognizing the cost in the forgiveness of our sins paid for by the Creator of the Stars, along with His commandment to forgive others who have hurt us. Together, these will bring all the healing required to be a fully-functioning, fruit-bearing child of God. Great or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Jesus will do the healing.

How We Are to Love

Woe is Me or *Peace in me*

I didn't forgive myself, I don't forgive myself, and I will never forgive myself

***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*** (1 John 1:9)

I was hurt, I am hurt, and I will be hurt

***“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven”*** (Luke 6:37, NKJV)

I was not loved, I am not loved, and I will not be loved

***“We love, because He first loved us”*** (1 John 4:19)

I have failed, I am failing, and I will fail

***“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*** (1 John 5:4-5)

I was weak, I am weak, and I will be weak

***“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong”*** (2 Corinthians 12:10)

***“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted”*** (Matthew 23:12)

***“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”*** (John 14:27)

And in His healing He will make us functional at the level He wants us to be. At His discretion and in His authority, He may leave varying amounts of scar tissue to resolve more slowly in order to remind us of the futility and frailty of our past lives and to remind us to drink daily, and throughout the day, of His living water.

Physical, mental, and/or emotional scars have their purpose, as “thorns in the flesh,” to cull self-boasting, to keep us perpetually in need of our Lord’s power and grace, and to understand the difficulties of others.

The difference between self- and servant-humility is most acutely contrasted when we are at our worst, perhaps sick or in the hospital. The choice is always there to either lament our circumstances or to willingly focus on the needs of others through prayer or by showing concern for caregivers or visitors. It is a daily battle of mindset that will yield tremendous peace and joy no matter what level of health or circumstance we are in.

The disavowing of guilt, shame and fear has also allowed the acceptance of self-pity among those with little or no disabilities; but in those who are in the pursuit of life’s riches rather than the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. It is a false humility that stems from the pitfalls of not obtaining happiness from, *“all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life...”* (1 John 2:16). It is a humility that is everything opposite in service to God and service to our neighbor. Rather, it is a self-humility of having difficulties in the idolatrous seeking of material, financial, and career stability. It is another type of “victimhood” that ignores the warning of Jesus,

*“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Matthew 13:22). Finally, it is a self-pity that reveals itself through the ideas of “we earned it because we struggled through life,” “the needy call themselves *entitled* and we will not *enable* them,” and “in the name of Jesus we will defend ourselves against anyone who comes against our values and traditions.”

Today, the financial-material-comfort-convenience status of an average middle class family outweighs any idea of what was considered “rich” in Jesus’ day. Compared to His day and to much of the current world, wealthy nations have more warmth or coolness, shelter, cloths, food, drink, and every conceivable convenience than could or can be imagined.

Thus, His warnings and direction for the rich must stand out more than ever. *“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away”* (James 1:9-11). *“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a*

*root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:6-10, NKJV).*

The “many sorrows” of the rich are a mainstay for media entertainment. This has led to its acceptance within the church to continually fuel the “victimhood” that congregants embrace when striving after the riches of this world. The “tough love” needed to rectify these problems, however, is coming: *“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN’” (Hebrews 12:26).*

It is not the possession of wealth but the humility and stewardship of it which are the issue. *“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).* When able, Paul supported himself together with others, *“I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35, NKJV).*

True humility is required for us to begin serving with whatever the Lord has allotted to each of us. A

continual and deepening humility, however, is required to serve our neighbor throughout our lives. Paul summarized the required multiple levels of service as, “*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

A servant life-style can often be romanticized in one’s mind, but quickly becomes anything but that when one is immersed in the seemingly chaotic-circumstance, emotional-whirlwind, opinion-exploding, and determinately-destitute lives of others. It is this very nature of people which the media exploits in every possible way to simultaneously entertain others and line their pockets.

If viewed this way from the outside, however, believers would never seek to bring Jesus into the world at the level that Jesus brought Himself into the world: from the inside. Rather, they would go to great lengths to ignore or twist scripture into something more palatable and doable. Yet viewed from within, through His humility, one quickly understands what grace means to others and to one’s self, and what the love of God means to this world and to ourselves.

One quickly sees and covets every piece of spiritual armor available, and constantly learns how to walk through the darkness or fires of others without themselves becoming lost or burnt. One quickly see that the small services of compassionate hands and words of Jesus are only signs that lead people to a Savior and Lord Who lights up the darkness and quenches the fire in anyone. We are only the bearers of little burdens that lead people to a Savior and Lord who can take their full burden for eternity.

Jesus defined humility in service saying, “*It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:26-28). A large difference between servant or slave status is that as servants we say to ourselves, “I will do this or that,” while as slaves others ask, “will you do this or that?” with varying or zero amounts of “please” and “thankyou.” It is always excellent to follow the Lord as a servant, but we should know that in doing so, the opportunities to become like or feel like a slave will always abound, and it requires humility rather than indignation to either bow out from those opportunities or engage them.

Following Jesus is an incredibly dynamic life full of internal and external spiritual drama. Thus, the current dilemma of boredom or being flat in one’s faith within the church speaks volumes regarding the potential to “hear Jesus” and to engage the world after hearing Him. It is one thing to preach, “out with the bad” in a Christian’s life, but quite another to say, “in with Jesus.” “Service with a smile” will never leave one bored or flat.

There is a place for righteous “humiliation” or shame during the process of “becoming like children” within the kingdom of heaven. As mentioned above, “*the rich man is to glory in his humiliation*” (James 1:10) and this is not simply a cynical statement about the rich. The poor constantly live a life of shame in the eyes of those who exalt themselves by their name and possessions, so Christians with more financial security should not resist the times of humiliation that they

encounter, but be thankful. God allows these times of humiliation as opportunities for people to humble themselves and to glorify Him.

Peter said, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time”* (1 Peter 5:6). In addition, God uses humiliation to discipline us similar to what Paul wrote the Thessalonian believers, *“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame”* (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

Lastly, humiliation and shame in this world (and in our flesh) is a necessary part of picking up one’s cross and suffering for Jesus. Accordingly, after the apostles had been flogged, *“they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41). In his book, *The Islamic Anti-Christ*, Joel Richardson provides excellent insight on martyrdom that may result from following Jesus, and how we and others will view it.<sup>7</sup> The intent of martyrdom is not a death of shining valor for a cause but seemingly shame, humiliation, weakness, and utter defeat in that cause. It is the highest form of self-emptying within the martyr, and the greatest loathing and embarrassment by those performing or witnessing it. It is how Jesus hung naked on the cross as a public spectacle of humiliation, and in Whom we are to emulate by, *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat*

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<sup>7</sup> Joel Richardson, *The Islamic AntiChrist*. (A WND Books book. WorldNetDaily, Los Angeles, CA., 2009)

*down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).*

## **With God’s Conduct**

*“The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:4-6).*

These verses summarize what the Christian life is, together with the eternal security that we find from it. When we keep His commandments, keep His word, and abide in Him then we know that His truth is in us, God’s love is perfected, and we know that we are in Him.

Again, this fruit does not come from ourselves but from the Holy Spirit Who lives within us. We do not boast of keeping His commandments or in the eternal security as coming from ourselves but from Him. Jesus demonstrated and taught us what the perfect fulfillment of God’s law and His conduct looks like on earth. He, Himself, is the personified word of God – the personified law and conduct of God. He, not select doctrines about Him, is the rock in how we are to live our lives.

The gospels teach us the *“manner as He walked,”* and how we are to set our lives to it, each according to their own ability. *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24), and “Everyone who hears these*

*words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand*” (Matthew 7:26). Everyone who reads His words accordingly hears His words, but only those who *do them* will survive and thrive.

In seeking true repentance that turns us to a true life in God, we must continually ask Jesus the same question that was asked by those who came to John the Baptist, “...*then what shall we do?*” (Luke 3:10). John told them to share what they had with those in need, to rely on God for provision and not profit, and to not extort and falsely accuse but be content with what God provides (Luke 3:11-14).

Following this, Jesus continues to answer that question by both His word and deed; and He is the only one who can teach us to live correctly. But each day we must look to Him, rather than rely on others to teach us. That is what distinguishes us as His “disciples” rather than disciples of a particular church or ministry. He is our direct link to the Father and He is the General, the Master, and our Friend (“*You are My friends if you do what I command you*” John 15:14).

Thus, each moment of each day we must 1) ask Him to teach us how to live, 2) listen for how He wants it applied in each situation, and 3) obey Him. “*It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me*” (John 6:45).

Our lifelong goal is to make the simple “head knowledge” that He has provided through His word into a finely tuned “street knowledge” that is used for each step of each day. Using an analogy of school, we know that the basic process is to learn some information and have a test, and then that portion of the

course is finished. Over the years, the entire process culminates into “an education.” Anyone who has had an actual job, however, can say that the real learning is in the doing; when we work each day on that job and it becomes ingrained in us. That is when head knowledge turns into street knowledge or a living knowledge – with all of its slow and fast, circular and straight currents that are part of any job. The gained work experience reduces the number of unexpected situations and allows us to anticipate changes and exceptions that come up regularly. In addition, it prepares us for future increased responsibilities or more difficult situations.

The beginning of our Christian lives, however, is not the start of a new education system, but the beginning of an apprenticeship where we are retained by our master to learn by doing. This is what happens when we are yoked to Jesus each day; we learn to move as He moves (or pulls us, if needed). The smallest blessings are from Him, and the greatest annoyances and difficulties also become His blessings because they take on His purpose. Humbling ourselves to Him and/or being humbled by Him become opportunities to find rest and strength in His yoke rather than traveling a road of our own that is full of grumbling and complaining, or resentment and bitterness. Resignation in or yielding to Him is part of the humility that brings relief, even though it may look like a far more difficult route.

An example comes from Peter at his first encounter with the Lord. After working all night, fishing in futility, and having cleaned and stowed everything in preparation for a day’s rest, Peter obeyed Jesus to undo it all and take the boat back out to fish,

*“Simon (Peter) answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets’”* (Luke 5:5, NIV). *“But because you say so,”* was the very first pull under the yoke of Jesus that brought an amazing new life with many more pulls, many more blessings, and eternal life.

In taking on the yoke of Jesus we eat from the tree of life, not from the tree of knowledge. In taking His yoke we move and live with Him. The written Word of God becomes the living Word of God that lives through us.

His written word, however, states that there will be many difficulties, yet in Him we will find the “peace that surpasses understanding” and “rest for your souls.” In obeying Jesus we will encounter internal struggle, *“...the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please”* (Galatians 5:17). And in obeying Jesus we will encounter external struggles, *“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you”* (John 15:18-19).

But it is from these struggles where we gain our greatest “work experience” and truly understand that He, Himself, is our food for life and how we are to obtain it from Him, *“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal”* (John 6:27); *“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me*

*will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”* (John 6:35); *“For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink”* (John 6:55); and *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”* (John 6:63).

Christians often hear about “doing great things for God.” The greatest things, however, can only be realized each day doing the smallest, least appreciated, and least admirable things (according to the world) that He told us to do. It requires no denominational or NPO license, certification, stamp, resume, board agreements, title, registration, permit, or accreditation. He has the only eternal authority of approval and He has told us how to “do great things” and be great in His kingdom: *“... but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:43-45).

In these verses Jesus distinguished *great* from *first* in His kingdom. To be “great,” we must be servants of each other; and to be “first,” we must be a slave of all – just as Jesus became a slave of all, even though He is Lord of all. This teaching was said in reply to the disciples becoming indignant with John and James for asking Him to grant them positions of honor in His kingdom (Mark 10:35-41). It is important to note that Jesus did not discourage their ambition to be great in His kingdom; rather, He taught them how to attain it. Similarly, He wants us to desire that greatness and pursue it in the way He told us to.

Mirroring the disciples’ indignation, many today think striving for greatness in God’s kingdom

will only lead to boasting and arrogance. But not to worry. There are currently flocks of “greats” and “firsts” in His kingdom all over the world who have all the importance of house-servants, the unimportance of slaves, and who are like “...*the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now*” (1 Corinthians 4:13). Boasting on their behalf is not even necessary since they are also “*well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when*” they are weak, they are strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). May we all likewise do “great things for God.”

Among many evangelicals today, there is only one commandment of Jesus that needs any attention and it is summarized in, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19). Much of what else Jesus taught and commanded, however, are not emphasized, ignored, or forgotten.

Ironically, the last part of the “greatest commandment” is to teach *all* of His other commandments: “...*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...*” (Matthew 28:20). The Sermon on the Mount alone is packed with such “lesser” commandments, but how often are they preached on as essential, and their difficulties in fulfillment workshopped by congregants? In the Sermon on the Mount, the condition of our hearts, our desires, how to pray, how to fast, how to take care of the poor, how to be married, how to view people, how to deal with the legal system, how to deal with inheritance, who to have over for dinner, who to greet, and the type of people to love are examples of those “lesser” commandments. In

addition, the rewards for heeding these commands and the consequences of not heeding them are also presented.

Matthew Chapter 23 also provides three specific case studies of our being prepared by these commandments and their eternal corollaries. From these passages, it is one thing to “get saved” but quite another to *follow* Jesus into eternal life. It is one thing to have Jesus as the “propitiation for our sins” but quite another to actually *believe in Him*. It is one thing to “be converted” but quite another to “*become like children*.” He rebuked these differences long ago with, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*” (Matthew 23:15).

It is the gospel – good news, indeed – that anyone can fulfill His greatest and least commandments. It starts with repentance and rebirth and continues in a life of hearing and obeying Him. Paul summarized it perfectly, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as 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 so that we would walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Being His workmanship and participating in His good works is simply part of being saved, part of who we are. If those who consider themselves “saved” are resistant to the good works prepared for them, then are they truly “*created in Christ Jesus?*” Do people want to be “saved” by but not “walk” with Jesus? Those

good works are the glorious, joyous, peace-filled wonderment of “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus said, “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:17-20). And Paul said, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Our test is to determine if we are walking in the good works prepared for us and if we are bearing fruit. If, however, we do fail the test, it is good news – great news, indeed – that we can start each day, again, by hearing Jesus.

In loving our neighbor according to the conduct of God, Jesus taught us what His conduct is like through the story of the Good Samaritan. Many Christians, however, will not translate this example into modern day application, and simply consider that they have never found a person lying in the road and that they do not have a donkey to put Him on, anyways. But if we are truly looking to “go and do *likewise*” as Jesus commanded, then there is an entire world of hurt and tormented people at our doorstep waiting to see and hear from the “little Christs” (Christians) who He sends them.

Luke writes that, “A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (Acts 16:9). No matter where we live or in what circumstances, there are still a

thousand Macedonians that are calling out to “come over and help us.”

Our actual neighbors may be elderly, overburdened in life, sick, injured, grieving, or financially hampered. There are lonely elderly neighbors in large or small nursing homes who are parents of children that now live busy lives. There are countless poor neighborhoods that are like separate islands of civilization surrounded by those with better incomes – like caricatures of Lazarus at the rich man’s gate, or like arched paths that the priest and Levite used to keep their distance from the man in the road. Many who are disabled also frequent these neighborhoods because it is actually the poor who are rich in faith and there are ministries that provide real society and fellowship for them to enjoy.

There are neighbors in countries that persecute Christians – neighbors that consist of both the persecuted and the persecutors. The persecutors, due to their unbelief and associated activities, inevitably find themselves and their citizens suffering intensely from cursed ground, financial despair, and brutal intolerance to everything. The Deceiver torments his own slaves, but the slaves still thirst for the living water of Jesus.

There are neighbors in any hospital that has a visitor or volunteer program, and neighbors in prisons to whom various ministries faithfully teach the freedom of Jesus to those who are confined. It is often said, facetiously, that everyone in prison becomes a Christian. Although Jesus will sort that out at His judgment seat, He will also sort out all “Christians” who did or did not do the will of their Heavenly Father. He said, “*Which of the two did the will of his father?*” They said, *‘The first.’* Jesus said to them, *‘Truly I say*

*to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him''* (Matthew 21:31-32).

Doing our Father's will in the way of righteousness also begins at home when arguments of opinions or the use of resources cause division. These divisions can be quickly quenched according to our Father's will by forgiving the other and asking for forgiveness with the humility of trying to understand the other's perspective at any level, even in total concession. This "no-judge" forgiving *character* of God can then lead to His *conduct* that blesses the other rather than creates more friction.

The home, itself, can act as an outreach ministry headquarters if a foundation of family prayer and teaching each other Jesus' words and ways are laid down. Even communion, in an attitude of humility and forgiveness for each other, can be shared at home.

Children can and should be given the task of being the primary monitors of these things. They can be taught about Jesus' commandments and that parents are also like big children who, themselves, are growing up again according to their Heavenly Father; and that they also have disobedience but will always be working against it and striving for Jesus their entire lives. Children can hear Jesus more than adults can imagine, and their innocent and timely reminders of His ways are like arrows that strike the next wrong word before it emerges from the silo of one's mouth. As a parent, there is always authority with love, but becoming their

peer next to Jesus and our Heavenly Father will cement that authority with every blessing imaginable.

The Good Samaritan offered his time, money, and compassion to the one in need. The same effort today may look huge in the face of a busy life that clings to its finances, but it is actually just a small intervention in another person's troubles for a miniscule portion of their life. Again, it is Jesus who does all the interventions of each person's life for the entirety of their life, and our words and deeds are just the child-like "little Christs" that point to Him. But Jesus said, *"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much"* (Luke 16:10).

So we must pay attention to the little things – both of faithfulness and of unrighteousness in our lives. It is the small details that count; small openings of faith can release much of God's righteousness while small closings of sin stop down much of God's righteousness.

In regard to levels of faithfulness, it is often preached that pointing to Jesus with such things as bumper stickers, license plates, or small white crosses in their lawns is a waste of time, and that unless they are telling people the "full gospel" at the busiest city intersection, then they are unworthy of Jesus. Jesus did in fact mention many things that would be found as unworthy of Him, but boasting in a particular type of ministry (especially when they, themselves, don't do that) was not one of them.

Rather, it is *"faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6), *"Let all that you do be done in love"* (1 Corinthians 16:14), and, *"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"*

(1 Corinthians 10:31) that is important. In light of the darkness that surrounds us and that is intensifying before our eyes, simply lifting up the name of Jesus by our witness, putting up a little white cross, or testifying through anything we own becomes a light to the nations.

The smallest ministries of, “*For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward*” (Mark 9:40-41), or greeting those who do not greet you (Matthew 5:46-47), or taking the least honorable positions in social settings or the last place in lines (Luke 14:8-11), or becoming like a woman named Tabitha who “*was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did* (including making many clothes for others, Acts 9:36, 39), or a plethora of other examples from God’s word create a foundational platform of God’s righteousness regardless of what position one has in society or in the church.

Anything and everything that the Lord has provided us can be part of *God’s conduct* to bless others. Examples include our cars for giving rides to others to church, bible-studies, prayer meetings, or outreaches; providing a cell phone or minutes; listening to the problems of others; passing out free Bibles and Christian media at outreaches for those in need; passing out scripture candy at Halloween; posting verses in public posting areas; serving at soup kitchens or food pantries; volunteering at elderly care facilities, afterschool programs, or with the disabled (under compliance to any screening and safety guidelines); providing an encouraging word or greeting to someone;

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helping people move; fixing bikes for those without cars; cleaning, lawn care, or snow-shoveling; buying groceries for those who are sick; care and support for persecuted Christians and their families; and lifting up the name of Jesus and testifying of Him via e-mails, e-mail signatures, letters, and Christmas and Easter letters.

These are just a few examples, but He wants us to enjoy the true freedom of being His children to combine His words and deeds with the creativity, skills, talents, and abilities (small or great) that He has given each of us. *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* and, *“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:31-32 and 36).

## CONCLUSION

The kingdom of God was made available to every person about 2000 years ago, and John wrote about it saying, *“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour”* (1 John 2:17-18, NKJV). And Peter wrote, *“The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:7-8).

These, the other apostles, and the Christians of that day expected Jesus’ imminent return and lived as if He would arrive at any moment. Although *“...the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”* (Malachi 4:5) was not to occur *“...until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24), they lived as though they were already in the kingdom of heaven, which, according to Jesus, they were. In their day, the spirit of the antichrist was more than active against the church, and they regularly suffered under deception, persecution, and martyrdom. But they lived under the love and fear of God rather than under the love and fear

of this world. How much more active is the spirit of the antichrist today when the entire world, in its variable arrays of evil, seems to be shaking its fist at Jesus?

A great harvest of souls is fast approaching and Jesus was more interested in teaching us how to prepare for that harvest than in how to stay comfortable, traditional, and safe while waiting for it. There is no earthly “religious freedom” in the kingdom of heaven; there is only heavenly freedom in hearing and following our Lord Jesus Christ into the confines of the bowels of darkness. John said, “*he who does the will of God abides forever,*” and Jesus showed us and told us how to do it.

To “become like children” in humility, forgiveness, and mercy underscore most of the conduct and character that Jesus desires in us. Jesus words, however, are always in contrast between our flesh and our spirit, leaving us at the crossroad between finding the fullness of life on this earth or the fullness of life in the spiritual battles of the heavenly places.

Indeed, either path is too much for any child to handle – but that is the point. It is only within that environment where we learn that obedience to Him makes us the most empowered, most protected, most comforted, most hopeful, and most blessed children on the planet. It will all simply become like a blink-of-an-eye in comparison to eternity when we personally experience, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; the former things will not be remembered or come to mind*” (Isaiah 65:17).

May we all be taught by God and teach others to be taught by Him.

*But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you. So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God.*  
(Joshua 23:8-11)

*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.*  
(1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

*For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.*  
(Isaiah 65:17-19)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kirk McCrea lives in the Detroit, Michigan area with his wife and son. He works as a cook for a Salvation Army community meal program and runs a free Christian book-table ministry for those attending soup kitchens and other community outreach events ([www.kingsbooktable.org](http://www.kingsbooktable.org)).

*HEARING JESUS* examines our Lord's plans for engaging in His spiritual battle designed to bring the kingdom of heaven into the kingdoms of this world, all the while bringing the fullest life imaginable to any believer who will face the darkness of this world. Jesus gave us a plethora of instructions for engaging in this battle, specific instructions that are intertwined with both admonishments and promises. At the end of His Sermon on the Mount, for instance, Jesus said that the storms and floods of this life (persecution and/or suffering) would sweep across the life that each believer has built on either the rock or the sand. The distinction given for where one has ultimately built are in those who act upon or do not act upon the instructions that He had just given.

While persecution and suffering seek to dislodge us from the foundations upon which we live, the word of God "is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:12-13 NASB).

*HEARING JESUS* examines how the piercing of His word ultimately restores, protects, and delivers both us and those around us from the battles of this earth and into His loving arms. Jesus is the Living Word and the Living God who has been creating a kingdom of living children since the foundation of the world.