

Dear Pathway Family

As 2023 is ending, I want to thank you for all the prayers and support you have provided over this past year. As you are all aware, we have had to overcome quite a few obstacles, but by the grace and mercy of God, we made it through. I have been in prayer, seeking the direction that God will have us go in the upcoming year, and I keep being reminded of the time Jesus fed the 5000 with just five loaves and two fishes. There are multitudes of people in this world still hungering for His Word. Thousands of souls die each day with no knowledge of the saving grace of our Father in Heaven. As Christians, God has commissioned us to tell of Him and witness to the unbelievers that they may know Him.

God is leading Bible Pathway Ministries to send out an additional 5000 Bibles and devotionals monthly, starting in January 2024. For this project to become a reality, I must ask in Jesus' precious name for your financial support in this endeavor. The estimated cost for this mission is \$250,000.00. We are stepping out in faith and preparing the first shipment, trusting that God will make it possible. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him (I John 5:14-15).

Twelve years ago, when I accepted God's calling to continue the ministry that He had begun so many years ago through Dr. John Hash, I had no idea what an impact it would have on my life. I have grown so much, and my Lord has walked by my side every step of the way. I have truly learned how powerful prayer can be and how to blindly have faith and trust in God's Word. The Bible is not just words in a book. It is full of instruction and promises from our Heavenly Father. I have been blessed beyond measure to be a part of such a meaningful ministry, and I look forward to seeing where God continues to lead us. God bless you all for all your prayers and support.

In His Love,

*Jennifer*

***Marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).***

***And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:15-17). And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (3:4-6).***

The young churches of Galatia were in trouble. Although they had eagerly accepted the Gospel of Christ when it had been initially presented to them, they also were receiving with 'open minds' the teachings of men who sought to twist God's Word for their own gain. These were men who were used to power under Jewish Law and were loath to admit that their 'elite standing' had been altered in any way. Cleverly, they didn't outright contradict the Gospel as the Galatians had first heard it. Instead, they added their own terms and conditions to it. In this way, they sought to draw in the fledgling Christians in much the same manner as the serpent had done to Eve.

From the very first moment that God's Word entered into this world, it has been challenged by those who seek to twist and corrupt it. God's Word is meant to sustain us and draw us into His

presence, and Satan has proven that he will do anything in his power to see to it that that doesn't happen. The keywords here are in his power. Satan has no power other than what is allotted to him by God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). He can deceive, tempt, and torment; he can whisper and suggest; he can even threaten and extort, but he cannot FORCE us to turn away from God.

Paul's words to the churches at Galatia were blunt and to the point. In listening to the perverted version of the gospel and allowing it to take root in their minds, they were choosing to follow a path other than the one laid out for them by God. Paul assured them they would be lost if they persisted down this path. ***Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh*** (Gal. 3:3)? No matter what we hear or what others try to impress upon us, it is our responsibility to remain faithful to God's Word, and ONLY God's Word. We know the truth, and we must live the truth. There is no other way.

***Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*** (1 John 4:1).

**Thought for the Day:** *Those with earnest faith allow His Word to direct them; they don't direct It to benefit themselves.*

**Cross References:** For **Gal. 3:6**: See Gen. 15:6. **Gal. 3:8**: See Gen. 12:3; 22:18. **Gal. 3:10**: See Deut. 27:26. **Gal. 3:11**: See Hab. 2:4. **Gal. 3:12**: See Lev. 18:5. **Gal. 3:13**: See Deut. 21:23.

**Word Studies:** 1:13 **conversation** = daily behavior, attitude of life; 2:13 **dissimulation** = insincerity, hypocrisy, and pretense.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox, Bible Pathway Ministries, President • **Government Officials:** Rep. Lance Gooden (TX), Sen. Rick Scott (FL), Sen. Gary Peters (MI) • **Country:** Kazakhstan (17,948,816) Central Asia • Major Languages: Kazakh, Russian • Restricted Religious Freedom • 70.2% Muslim (largely Sunni); 23.9% Russian Orthodox; 2.3% Other Christian; 0.1% Buddhist; 0.2% Other; 2.8% Atheist; 0.5% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray with a heart of righteousness, keeping the truth of God, and know He will hear your prayers (Is. 26:2).

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*** (Gal. 5:22-25).

In chapter five of the Book of Galatians, Paul warns of 17 specific sins that have the power to separate us from the Lord: ***Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*** (5:19-21). These verses have gotten much attention over the years, primarily because they are a shocking, in-your-face list of sins. Paul leads off with sexual immorality and then moves on to cover idolatry, the occult, and a wide range of failings brought about by the unchecked desires of the baser elements of human nature. Many Christians today use this list, consciously or unconsciously, to prove their righteousness, boldly proclaiming that they would never even consider behaving in such a manner and that those who do so are flirting with the fires of hell.

Paul, however, was not sharing this list in condemnation or judgment; he was simply stating the truth as it existed under the Law. Jesus had said, ***But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*** (Matt. 5:28). Paul understood that this principle applied to sin as a whole. Therefore, he knew that the list he had just given was descriptive of every person on earth in one form or another. Under the Law, righteousness was beyond the ability of man (Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:10); therefore, no one was worthy of inheriting ***the kingdom of God***.

Without Christ, we are all slaves to sin (John 8:34). Yet in accepting His grace, we have been freed. ***And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts***. Our sins have been forgiven, and we have been endowed with

the Holy Spirit, enabling us to stand firm in the face of temptation. Only now, fed by the spring of Jesus' love, can we bear **the fruit of the Spirit**. This is Paul's message. This is what he so passionately wants us to understand. The Law cannot save us. It can direct our actions and tell us what not to do, but it cannot control our hearts. The grace of God is the only thing that can give us a tender new heart (Ezek. 36:26), and it is the only way in which we can be counted as righteous.

***There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*** (Rom. 8:1-4).

**Thought for the Day:** *Recognizing that we don't deserve salvation is a difficult concept for many, but it is the necessary first step toward receiving it.*

**Cross References:** For **Gal. 4:27**: See Is. 54:1. **Gal. 4:30**: See Gen. 21:10. **Gal. 5:14**: See Lev. 19:18.

**Word Studies:** 4:4 **made under the Law** = born of a woman as a subject to the Law; 4:6 **Abba** = Aramaic word for Father; 4:12 **injured** = wronged, taken advantage of; 4:24 **gendereth to** = leads to; 4:25 **answereth** = corresponds; 5:19 **uncleanness** = immoral conduct; **lasciviousness** = immodesty, vulgarity, unrestrained lust; 5:20 **variance** = contentious temper, strife; **emulations** = jealousy, rivalry; **seditions** = dissensions, divisions; 6:6 **communicate unto** = share in the financial needs of; 6:12 **constrain** = compel.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Robert Garcia(CA) • **Country:** Kenya (45,010,056) Eastern Africa • **Major Languages:** English, Swahili • **Religious Freedom** • 47.4% Protestant; 23.3% Roman Catholic; 11.8% Other Christian; 11.1% Muslim; 1.6% Traditionalist; 1.7% Other; 2.4% None; 0.7% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Keep your mind on the Lord and trust Him; He will give you peace (Is. 26:3).

***A*ccording as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace** (Eph. 1:4-7).

The Book of Ephesians exudes Paul's great confidence and assurance in the Lord his God. From the first verse of chapter one to the last verse in chapter six, Ephesians offers a powerful, positive affirmation of faith. In today's reading, Paul equates the collective human experience with belief in the Lord and the saving power of Jesus Christ.

***Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations*** (Jer. 1:5). The first three chapters of the Book of Ephesians read as a heartfelt prayer. Paul understood the truth of his service to the Lord. He knew that it was by the grace of God that his eyes had been opened, thereby allowing him to step willingly into the family of God. ***Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you*** (John 15:16). Although Paul had made a real and defining choice—born out of free will—as he fell to his knees on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:7-10), he was only capable of making that choice at the invitation of God.

Each and every one of us, as we live our lives in service to the Lord, can stand confident in the fact that He has chosen us for that service. It is in the nature of man to doubt. We question our actions and choices, constantly wondering if another option would have been wiser or yielded better results. God, however, has no such doubts. He has called us into His service, and He stands by that decision. ***For the gifts and calling of God are***

***without repentance*** (Rom. 11:29). His love for us knows no bounds, and it is from the cradle of that love that we, like Paul, can move forward with confidence.

Having been ***chosen before the foundation of the world***, we are secure in the service of Christ. Once we have affirmed our commitment to Him by acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9), no one and nothing can ever forcibly remove us from His protection (John 10:28). By daily reading His Word with a desire to do His will and faithfully following after the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we are assured of experiencing the total fulfillment of His perfect will for our lives. ***For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*** (Phil. 2:13). ***And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*** (Gal. 6:9).

***In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory*** (Eph. 1:13-14).

**Thought for the Day:** *Sin is the only thing that keeps us from God; when we feel that we cannot reach Him, it is because we have allowed our sins to weigh us down.*

**Cross References:** For **Eph. 1:22:** See Ps. 8:6. **Eph. 2:17:** See Is. 57:19.

**Word Studies:** 1:8 **prudence** = spiritual insight, knowledge and holy love of the will of God; 1:10 **dispensation of the fulness of times** = last period of the dealings of God with mankind on earth; 1:13 **sealed** = proof of ownership that we belong to the Family of God; 1:14 **earnest** = first installment of our inheritance; 2:1 **quicken** = made alive; 2:13 **sometimes** = formerly (not "occasionally"); 3:3 **mystery** = purpose of God which is hidden from the ungodly; 3:13 **faint not** = don't give up or be discouraged.

**Pray For Government Officials:** Rep. Kathy Manning (NC) • **Country:** Kiribati (104,488) 33 Islands in Southwestern Pacific • **Major Languages:** I-Kiribati, English • **Religious Freedom** • 55.8% Roman Catholic; 40.2% Protestant; 2.3% Baha'i; 1.5% Other; 0.2% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Cry and pour out your soul in prayer in time of affliction (Is. 26:16).



***Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (Eph. 5:1-2).***

Being an adult in today's world is anything but easy. In addition to having to live inside the boundaries of civil and criminal law, we also have a multitude of social constructs and expectations that define how we should act and what we should think and feel in any given situation. Making it even more difficult is the constant fluctuation of societal norms. What is considered 'right' and 'true' is fluid and primarily determined by the vocal majority at any given time. As Christians, we are often confused and confounded by the world around us. We wonder how we can honor God while still actively participating in society. The truth is, we are overthinking it. We do not have to find our own path; we just need to follow the one Jesus already laid out for us.

***Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me (Matt. 16:24).*** If we look closely at the Gospel of Christ, we find that Jesus lived His life fully immersed in the world around Him. He did not shut Himself away from the needy and the desperate. He did not shun the sinner nor turn His back on the immoral. Instead, He welcomed them, showing them kindness and hospitality. ***And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples (Matt. 9:10).*** While at no time did Jesus ever embrace the sin, He loved the sinner with the fullness of God's mercy and grace, and in the process, He modeled for all future Christians the exact manner in which He expected us to engage the world.

***Be ye therefore followers of God.*** Many today go through their lives confident that they are ***followers of God*** on the basis of their church membership and their recognized Christian status in the community. They believe themselves to be entirely righteous in all that they set their minds to, and they revel in the assumed approval of God for every action they undertake.



Caught up in their own sense of accomplishment and pride, they never notice how different their path is from the one that Jesus walked. Although they profess ‘faith,’ they have never experienced grace, and consequently, they are unable to share that grace with others in need.

Unless we approach God with the humble, open acceptance of a child, we will never truly be **followers of God**. We must trust Him in all things and accept Him as Lord of our lives in deed as well as in word (1 John 3:18). If we are **followers of God**, then we will tread the path that He trod, trusting Him to lead us to glory as He sees fit.

***And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*** (Matt. 18:3).

**Thought for the Day:** *God expects His followers to shape the world, not control it.*

**Cross References:** For **Eph. 4:8**: See Ps. 68:18. **Eph. 4:25**: See Zech. 8:16. **Eph. 4:26**: See Ps. 4:4. **Eph. 5:31**: See Gen. 2:24. **Eph. 6:2-3**: See Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16.

**Word Studies:** 4:13 **perfect** (does not mean perfection) = sincerely desiring to be obedient to His Word; 4:14 **carried about . . . by the sleight** = led astray by false doctrine; 4:16 **compacted** = knit together in true unity; 4:18

**Pray For Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Official:** Rep. Greg Landsman (OH), Rep. Grace Napolitano (CA), Rep. Kevin Hern (OK), Rep. Nancy Mace (SC) • **Country:** Korea, North (24,851,627) Eastern Asia • Major Language: Korean • Government-sponsored religious groups exist to provide illusion of religious freedom • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and praise God that the answers to your prayers are granted through the grace of God (Is. 30:19).

***Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 3:12-14).

***Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved*** (4:1). The church at Philippi was near and dear to Paul's heart. Paul felt a special kinship with this robust community of faith that he'd helped found during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:12-40). In the eyes of the world, this church did not have much going for it. Most of its members were desperately poor, and they were constantly harassed and attacked by neighbors who felt threatened by the gospel of Christ. Yet, instead of allowing this to deter them, they remained united in their faith. They were committed to spreading the Gospel (Phil. 4:15-18), and they gave liberally, of their own accord, to ease the poverty of others (II Cor. 8:1-5). It is little wonder then that the letter they received from Paul was one of joy and encouragement. These courageous souls truly understood what it meant to live in Christ (Gal. 2:20), and Paul rejoiced in their faith.

Paul urged them to stay strong and encouraged them to remember that they belonged to God, not the world. He reminded them that, as citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), they were correct in holding themselves to a higher moral standard than the unsaved masses. Still, he cautioned them not to go overboard. They needed to remember that salvation did not equal instant perfection. He stressed that, while they should always strive to do their best to live as Christ lived, perfection (never sinning, ever!) would only be attained after they received the ***prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*** that awaited them when they entered the kingdom of God.

Immediately after we give ourselves to God, we feel fresh, pure, and invincible. We are convinced that being 'good' from

then on will be easy. We pay lip service to the phrase "we are all sinners," but we are confident that although we used to be a sinner, we aren't any longer. This euphoria lasts until the first time we slip up. We make the wrong choice and are almost immediately overcome with guilt and confusion. We are not alone in this. Even the Apostle Paul had periods of weakness: ***For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I*** (Rom. 7:15). We wonder, can God forgive us, when we knew better? Are we still saved? The answer to both questions is a resounding YES! ***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*** (1 John 1:9). Remember, perfection is a process that won't happen overnight—or even in our lifetime on this earth. Still, that is not a reason for us to despair. God has promised all that obediently place their faith in Him that, through His grace, we WILL stand, sanctified and perfect, before His heavenly throne.

***For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*** (Heb. 10:14).

**Thought for the Day:** *Those who find themselves not favored by the world have something in common with Christ.*

**Cross References:** For Phil. 2:7: See Is. 42:1.

**Word Studies:** 1:7 **meet** = right; 1:8 **my record** = my witness; **bowels** = affections; 1:14 **waxing confident** = gaining confidence; 1:22 **wot** = know; 1:23 **in a strait betwixt two** = hard pressed between the two; 1:28 **an evident token of perdition** = evidence of impending destruction; 2:3.

**Pray For Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Official:** Rep. French Hill (AR)  
• **Country:** Korea, South (49,039,986) Eastern Asia • **Major Languages:** Korean, English • **Religious Freedom** • 24% Protestant; 7.6% Roman Catholic; 24.2% Buddhist; 0.9% Other/Unknown; 43.3% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Give praise to God that His Word will stand forever (Is. 40:8).

***As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*** (Col. 2:6-9).

The moment we recognize Jesus Christ as Lord, a miraculous transformation begins. As we are flooded with His love and grace, we find ourselves enveloped in a peace greater than any we have ever known. ***And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 4:7). In the days that follow, however, the initial euphoria often fades, leaving us with one final life-altering choice. We can either keep our focus on the world and try to figure out a way to add Christ to it, or we can shift our focus to Him and allow Him to shape our interactions with the world as we ***walk (ye) in Him***.

The first option seems attractive to many but is, in truth, a trap set for new believers by Satan himself. Satan wants us to believe that we are free to run our own lives as we see fit and still claim salvation from God. He whispers in our ear that our intellectual acceptance satisfies God and that nothing further is required of us. This ***philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men***, is then embraced and further spread by modern-day false prophets (Matt. 7:15-17; II Pet. 2:1-3). For those who accept these teachings as truth, the future is grim indeed. They have convinced themselves that they have received salvation from God, but they have never truly met Him. ***And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*** (Matt. 7:23).

Intellectually recognizing Jesus as our Lord and Savior is a necessary first step, but if we are to become His children now and for all eternity, we must give ourselves over to Him and allow Him to make us anew. ***Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed***

***away; behold, all things are become new*** (II Cor. 2:17). When we accept Jesus, we relinquish our individual lives in exchange for eternal life in Him. From that point on, He becomes our life source. We become rooted in His Word, fed by His love, and led by His Spirit. Anything less is unacceptable to Him. ***Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it*** (Matt. 16:24-25).

This total transformation in Christ was something that Paul was intimately familiar with, and it was an experience that he was eager to share with the young congregation at Colossae. His letter was intended to provide them with support and encouragement to let go of the teachings of the world and bind themselves wholly to the teachings of Christ.

***Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*** (John 8:31-32).

**Thought for the Day:** *An individual's relationship with God is deeply personal, but if it is strong and healthy, it will never be private.*

**Cross References:** For **Col. 2:11**: See Deut. 10:16. **Col. 3:23**: See Eccl. 9:10. **Col. 4:6**: See Eccl. 10:12.

**Word Studies:** 1:12 **meet** = sufficient; 1:13 **translated** = transferred; 1:23 **settled** = firmly grounded; 2:4 **beguile** = deceive; 2:23 **will worship** = self-inspired efforts at worship; 3:5 **Mortify** = Treat as dead; **concupiscence** = uncontrolled desire for what is forbidden, especially sexual immorality.

**Pray For Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Brittany Pettersen (CO), Rep. Andrea Salinas (OR) • **Country:** Kosovo (1,859,203) Southeast Europe • Religious Freedom • 95.6% Muslim; 2.2% Roman Catholic; 1.4% Serbian Orthodox Church; 0.8% Other/None/No Response • **Prayer Suggestion:** Wait upon the Lord and He will renew your strength (Is. 40:31).

**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:2-10).**

Despite the chaotic and rushed manner in which they were sown (Acts 17:1-10), the seeds of the Gospel that Paul planted in Thessalonica had fallen on fertile ground. When Paul received word through Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy that the fledgling church was strong and active, He immediately praised God, thanking Him for His boundless grace and mercy and the provision of the Holy Spirit, to which he credited the success of the Thessalonian church. **For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.**

Paul's joy was not brought about because he believed those in the church to be perfect and blameless in the sight of God and man but because he saw the light of God in them. **Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.** As he continued his letter, Paul would address doctrinal confusion and other problems within the

congregation—everything from gossip and slander to sexual impurity. But his first action was acknowledging and celebrating their visible, heartfelt faith. ***For from you sounded out the word of the Lord.***

We are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world. No single member of the body of Christ living today can truthfully claim to be 100% righteous and blameless before God. None of us are above needing loving, Christian correction and guidance from time to time, and God charges all of us to offer the same to our brothers and sisters in Christ when necessary. ***Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*** (Gal. 6:1). But the next time you feel moved to correct or instruct, take a minute to reflect on Paul's message to the Thessalonians. Consider the person you are approaching, and rejoice in the fruits of the Spirit you see emanating from their lives. Join with them in praising God for His gift of faith, which has made it possible for us to partake of His mercy and grace. Then, as the Spirit leads, share with them the knowledge and wisdom God has laid on your heart.

***And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*** (Heb. 10:24).

**Thought for the Day:** *To take pride in our own accomplishments is to remove God's hand from them; to take pride in God's accomplishments is to find fulfillment in His service.*

**Cross References:** For I Thess. 5:4: See Is. 35:4.

**Word Studies:** 2:2 **entreated** = mistreated, suffering outrageously; 2:9 **chargeable** = a burden; 3:8 **fast** = firm; 4:4 **possess his vessel** = control his body; 4:8 **despiseth** = rejects; 5:14 **unruly** = disorderly.

**Pray For Government Officials:** Sen. Susan Collins (ME) • **Country:** Kuwait (2,742,711) Mideast • **Major Languages:** Arabic, English • **Some Religious Freedom** • 85% Muslim; 15% Other (Christian, Hindu, Parsi) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and depend upon the Lord when in need, for He will not forsake you (Is. 41:17).



**N**ow we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat (II Thess. 3:8-10).

When we read from God's Word, we frequently encounter verses that appear to have reasonably straightforward meanings. But when we carefully note the context in which the words were spoken, we discover that our initial interpretation was off the mark. Such is the case in the third chapter of Paul's second Epistle to the congregation at Thessalonica. In it, Paul states rather bluntly **that if any would not work, neither should he eat**. While on the surface, this seems to be a straightforward directive to limit our acts of compassionate charity, when taken in context, it soon becomes apparent that that was not the message Paul intended to convey.

The situation in the Thessalonian congregation had grown dire. A faction had sprung up within the believers that was so hyper-focused on the earthly return of Jesus that the only thing they were willing to do was watch and wait. They neglected their families, their jobs, and their responsibilities to the congregation as a whole. These people expected everyone else to meet their earthly needs without putting forth any effort themselves. As with most of the early churches, the congregation at Thessalonica operated under the principle of community (Acts 2:44-46), and the resources of the congregation were being strained to the breaking point by these lazy and self-centered members. Paul's words were intended as a sharp rebuke to the members who were causing the imbalance and a gentle reminder to the rest of the congregation that 'caring for their brother' did not mean they were required to allow themselves to be used and taken advantage of.

Over generations, these words have become the battle cry of the smug, the self-righteous, and the judgmental. They are

oft-quoted by those who desire to avoid the entanglements of charity and compassion entirely, as well as by those who wish to perform their 'Christian duty' only under their own terms. The problem with this, of course, is that it completely contradicts Jesus' expectations of us. ***Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets*** (Matt. 7:12). We are called to love and care for others with no strings attached, just as He loves and cares for us. ***He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise*** (Luke 3:11). It is not our place to judge if the need is real; it is our responsibility as representatives of Christ to meet the need we see.

As for Paul's admonishments, we would be wise to take them to heart in the same spirit they were given. Not as a directive to judge others, but as a yardstick against which we can judge ourselves. Are we giving the best of ourselves to God? Are we putting in the necessary work, or are we unfairly taking advantage of the generous natures of those around us? Before attempting to control others, we must first learn to control ourselves.

***But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden*** (Gal. 6:4-5).

**Thought for the Day:** *Living in today's world is a challenge all Christians must face; God has united us so that we never have to face it alone.*

**Cross References:** For **II Thess. 1:8**: See Is. 1:28. **II Thess. 2:3**: See Dan. 7:25. **II Thess. 2:4**: See Ezek. 28:2.

**Word Studies:** 1:3 **meet** = fitting, right; 2:17 **stablish** = strengthen, make firm; 3:7 **disorderly** = irresponsibly.

**Pray For Staff:** Kevin Jennings • **Government Officials:** Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) • **Country:** Kyrgyzstan (5,604,212) Central Asia • Major Languages: Kyrgyz, Russian • Restricted Religious Freedom • 75% Muslim; 20% Russian Orthodox; 5% Other (Jewish, Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Jehovah Witness, Bahai) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Amidst uncertainty, seek the guidance of God (Is. 42:16).

***Exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (I Tim. 2:1-2).***

At the time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the Roman emperor Nero was ruthlessly persecuting Christians in an attempt to remove once and for all the threat this 'new' religion posed to his absolute control of Rome. In the face of such attacks, one might have expected Paul to counsel Timothy on ways in which their people might undermine or avoid the crazed emperor, but instead, Paul emphasized the importance of Christians praying for ***all that are in authority***, regardless of their conduct. Paul went so far as to say that they should offer ***thanks*** to God for the man whom He had placed over them. He backed up this plea with the authority granted him by Jesus Christ our Lord: ***Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity (2:7).*** He went on to further explain: ***I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (2:8).***

Paul's message is simple, drawn straight from the Word of the Lord, and is as applicable to us today as it was in the time of Timothy. Regardless of their spiritual health, all of our leaders serve at the pleasure of God. ***Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1).*** First and foremost, we must pray that, through them, the Lord's will be done. As we lift up our local, state, national, and world leaders to Him, it is our responsibility to pray that their hearts might be opened more fully and that they might feel the love and support of our Heavenly Father as they go about governing His people. Whether they realize it or not, they are working for God. He will ultimately use their actions or inactions to further His will and care for His people. ***The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will (Prov. 21:1).***

When we are tempted to ask, “How can this be so, with so many obviously godless leaders in the world?” we must remember God’s instructions to the exiles in Babylon: ***And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace*** (Jer. 29:7). We cannot presume to know God’s plan — ***For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD*** (Is. 55:8) — or His reasons for allowing the godless to persist in positions of power, but that does not mean we should trust Him any less. Instead, we should redouble our spiritual focus and widen the net of our prayers. We have His promise that faithful prayers have the power to move mountains (Matt. 21:20-22). Why, then, should we doubt their power to heal our nation?

***If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*** (II Chr. 7:14).

**Thought for the Day:** *Rather than envy or disgust, we should feel sympathy for many of our worldly leaders. Who is farther from salvation than a godless man flush with worldly power?*

**Cross Reference:** For I Tim. 5:18: See Deut. 25:4.

**Word Studies:** 1:5 **unfeigned** = genuine; without hypocrisy; 1:10 **men-stealers** = kidnappers, people who enslave (control) others for their own evil purposes; 2:9 **shamefacedness** = modest behavior, reverence; 2:12 **usurp authority** = domineer; 3:2 **husband of one wife** = married only once until parted by death; **vigilant** = disciplined, self-controlled; 3:8 **greedy of filthy lucre** = craving wealth; 3:13 **purchase to themselves a good degree** = gain a good reputation; 5:11 **wax wanton against Christ** = allow their passions to draw them away from Christ.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Gov. Glenn Youngkin (VA) • **Country:** Laos (6,803,699) Southeast Asia • **Major Languages:** Lao, French • **Restricted Religious Freedom** • 67% Buddhist; 1.5% Christian; 31.5% Other/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek the Lord in prayer, turn from your sinful ways, and God will have mercy and pardon for you (Is. 55:6-7).

***I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (II Tim. 4:1-5).***

Few things are as demonized in today's world as Biblical truths. God's Word has become harsh and archaic to the modern ear, and for many, its rigid adherence to spiritual and moral absolutes has become a source of embarrassment and shame. In an effort to boost flagging memberships and reconnect with the outside world, more and more churches have taken to softening the perceived harshness of the Word by removing any reference to Godly absolutes and instead encouraging their congregations to "listen to the dictates of their conscience" and "follow the leadings of their hearts," assuring their congregants that "God loves them just as they are" and "God wants them to be happy." The world no longer desires to hear **sound doctrine**; it wants **fables**, which many **teachers** seem only too happy to provide.

In light of all of this, Paul's charge to Timothy gains an urgency that we cannot afford to ignore. No longer can we read it merely as a formal 'passing of the torch' between godly men, but instead, we must accept it in all fullness and scope. Paul may have been speaking to Timothy, but his charge was laid on a much wider audience, an audience of which we are a vital member.

Having been reborn into the body of Christ, we have a responsibility, both to ourselves and the rest of the world, to live openly in His Word. ***Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (Matt. 5:14). Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your***

**good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven** (5:16). Furthermore, we are obligated to share the Word with everyone we come into contact with. **And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature** (Mark 16:15). In a world that has devoted itself to promoting false teachings, we must stand firm in our faith and never at any time waver on what we know to be true. **Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.** God's Word holds the key to unlocking salvation, but it becomes powerless when modified. **What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it** (Deut. 14:32). It is our responsibility, and our greatest privilege, to ensure that the truth can still be heard loud and clear by all who chose to hear it.

**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ** (I Pet. 3:15-16).

**Thought for the Day:** *The power of God's Word can't be appropriated. When repurposed by another, it is no longer His, thus rendering it meaningless.*

**Cross Reference:** For **II Tim. 2:19:** See Num. 16:5; also Nah. 1:7.

**Word Studies:** 2:4 **entangleth himself** = becomes involved; 2:23 **gender strifes** = create or beget quarrels; 3:3 **incontinent** = without self-control; 4:15 **be thou ware** = be aware, be on guard.

**Pray For Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Mark Takano (CA), Rep. Austin Scott (GA), Sen. John Boozman (AR) • **Country:** Latvia (2,165,165) Eastern Europe • Major Languages: Latvian, Russian • Religious Freedom • 19.6% Lutheran; 15.3% Orthodox; 1% Other Christian; 0.4% Other; 63.7% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and call upon the Lord with assurance that He will answer if you pray with a godly spirit free from sin (Is. 58:9-11).

***Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men*** (Titus 3:1-2).

Paul, imprisoned and facing an uncertain future, identified himself simply as a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Phlm. 1:1). To him, nothing else mattered. He was content wherever he was because he knew that Jesus remained in control. Even so, Paul accepted that he was a Roman citizen and that he lived under the authority of Roman law (Acts 16:37; 22:25-27). He addressed this issue at length in his letter of introduction to the believers in Rome: ***Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*** (Rom. 13:1-2).

Many well-meaning Christians today question the literal interpretation of these directives. They refuse to believe that God would 'support' the ungodly, so they soften Paul's words by claiming that believers are only called to submit themselves to the rule of righteous, God-fearing individuals. They teach that all governmental mandates that are not based upon the principles of God should be ignored. They rally around this verse: ***Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men*** (Acts 5:29), using it as a 'God-pass' to justify anarchy. God's Word, however, does not back up their claim.

***And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at Him*** (Mark 12:17). Christians are not at liberty to choose which laws to obey and which to disobey. Peter was led by God to write: ***Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of***



**foolish men** (I Pet. 2:13-15). As long as the laws do not directly contradict His commandments, God expects us to obey them.

We are given an example of this in Paul's advice to Onesimus, a runaway slave. While slavery was/is an immoral construct (a fact that Paul did not argue against, as we can see in his letter to Philemon), it was still supported by the law of the land, and it was against the law for a slave to run away. Having given himself over to Christ, it was Onesimus' responsibility to comply with the law and accept the consequences of his actions. Paul appealed to Philemon to receive Onesimus' with kindness, as a brother in Christ, but he did not dispute Philemon's right (under the law) to handle things as he saw fit.

God has put us under earthly authority, but that does not mean that we, as Christians, have the right to mistreat others or prosper at their expense just because the law allows for it. God has commanded us to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34), and no authority exists that has the power to supersede that command.

***If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*** (Rom. 12:18).

**Thought for the Day:** *God has us obey the laws of man not to bind us to the world, but instead so that we recognize His authority over it.*

**Cross References:** For **Titus 1:2**: See Num. 23:19.

**Word Studies:** Titus 1:14 **Jewish fables** = myths; 2:10 **purloining** = stealing, even small things; Philemon 1:8 **enjoin** = to order you to do that which is proper; 1:12 **mine own bowels** = out of my very heart.

**Pray For Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Lebanon (5,882,562) Middle East • Major Languages: Arabic, French • Limited Religious Freedom • 59.7% Muslim; 39% Christian; 1.3% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Confess and forsake all sin (Is. 59:12-13).

***Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation (Heb. 3:12-15).***

God is eternal. In Him, there is no beginning and no end (Ps. 90:2). In comparison, the earthly life of mortal man is no more than that of a mayfly, here one instant and gone the next. ***Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not*** (Job. 14:1-2). We have been put on this earth for one purpose, and one purpose only, so that we might come to know our Creator and, of our own free will, accept Him as our Lord. While theoretically, we have our entire lifetime in which to accomplish this, every second that we choose to live without Him places us in extreme jeopardy.

***But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ‘Tomorrow’ may well be one of the most dangerous words known to man.*** ‘Tomorrow’ implies the promise of limitless time and infinite chances. ‘Tomorrow’ makes us feel invincible. It quiets all feelings of urgency and replaces them with a slow and steady pull toward procrastination and laziness. ‘Tomorrow’ provides us with a (false!) sense of security and well-being. As long as we believe we have tomorrow, we are content to squander today.

The problem with this, of course, is that ALL we have is today. Right now—this single instant—is all we are promised and all we can rely on. Tomorrow may indeed come, but if it does, it will dawn as a gift, not a promise. Today is when we must make our choice. Today is when we need to find our feet and stand for God. Today is the day we must open our ears and our hearts and saturate both of them with God’s Word and His grace so that they may stay supple and tender through all

of His ages to come, long after the tomorrows of this world are nothing more than a distant memory.

God's Word cannot be any clearer on the subject. ***Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*** It is imperative that we avail ourselves of God's love and grace TODAY—right now, before another second passes. If we put Him off, we do so at our own peril. He will always be there, but that doesn't mean that we will be.

***Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*** (James 4:13-15).

**Thought for the Day:** *The purpose for which we have been put on this earth is well documented, but unless we look in His Word, we will never find it.*

**Cross References:** For **Heb. 1:3:** See Ps. 110:1. **Heb. 1:5:** See Ps. 2:7; II Sam. 7:14. **Heb. 1:6:** See Ps. 97:7. **Heb. 1:7:** See Ps. 104:4. **Heb. 1:8-9:** See Ps. 45:6-7. **Heb. 1:10-12:** See Ps. 102:25-27. **Heb. 1:13:** See Ps. 110:1.

**Word Studies:** Heb. 2:17 **behoved** = was necessary for, was imperative for; 4:8 **Jesus** = not the Lord Jesus Christ, but Joshua. Jesus is the Greek word of the Hebrew Joshua. Joshua could not provide complete peace in their "promised land" because of their unbelief. Israelites in that day had to look forward to heaven for their perfect peace, just as Christians do today; 4:12 **quick** = living.

**Pray For Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Country:** Lesotho (1,942,008) Southern Africa • Major Languages: Sesotho, English • Religious Freedom • 80% Christian; 20% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and rejoice in the Lord for all His spiritual blessings (Is. 61:10)

***For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee. As He saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*** (Heb. 5:1-6).

Aaron, the first high priest of the Israelites, did not volunteer for the job, nor was he selected by the people. Instead, he was chosen by God. On the Day of Atonement, God directed him to make penance, first for his sins and then for the sins of his household. Only after doing so would he be qualified to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:11-15). This same scenario played out with every high priest serving from that time until the time of Christ.

Under the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants, sacrifice was made when a sinless animal took the place of an Israelite and was slain as payment for his sin. Thus, the devout Jew was continually reminded: ***For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul*** (17:11).

When Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, took His place as the last and eternal High Priest, the blood price for sin was paid in full. ***The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*** (John 1:29). ***And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him*** (Heb. 5:9). Christ's work on the cross assured that no further sacrifice will ever need to be made or be able to be made. Unless we accept the sacrifice He made in our stead, there can be no forgiveness of our sins.

God is holy; therefore, He must enforce the penalty for sin. God loves us, however, and His justice is tempered with mercy and an offer of grace. ***For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*** (Rom. 6:23). How thankful we should be that mercy is an attribute of God, for it is one of our greatest daily needs. Mercy expresses His willingness to forgive sinners and deliver them from eternal hell. Mercy is His practical demonstration of love and compassion. Under the Levitical priesthood, the Lord's mercy was praised. ***And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation*** (Ex. 34:6-7). How much more we can be assured of God's mercy through Christ, our exalted Lord, as He makes intercession for us (Heb. 7:25; 9:24)!

***For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved*** (John 3:17).

**Thought for the Day:** *There is no one alive without a desperate need for God's mercy; fortunately for us, His only requirement is that we ask for it.*

**Cross References:** For **Heb. 5:5:** See Ps. 2:7. **Heb. 5:6:** See Ps. 110:4. **Heb. 6:14:** See Gen. 22:17.

**Word Studies:** 6:17 **immutability of His counsel** = His purpose will not be altered.

**Pray For • Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Official:** Rep. Donald Norcross (NJ), Rep. Jamie Raskin (MD), Rep. Anna Eshoo (CA) • **Country:** Liberia (4,902,310) West Africa • Major Languages: English and more than 20 local languages of the Niger-Congo language group • Religious Freedom • 85.6% Christian; 12.2% Muslim; 0.6% Traditional; 0.2% Other; 1.4% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray persistently (Is. 62:6).

***But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second (Heb. 8:6-7). In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).***

It can be comforting to believe that we have options in life. We have been conditioned since childhood to always have a contingency plan in place for any significant situation to increase our chances for success in the event of unforeseen complications. The idea of relying on a fallback plan had become very attractive to the Jewish Christians to whom the Book of Hebrews was first addressed. Persecution of Christians had reached an all-time high, and there were those amongst them who had begun to believe that the cost of following Christ was too steep. They felt it would be safer to return to the old ways and honor God in the manner of their ancestors. This, they reasoned, would be good enough, as it was still a path that had been prescribed by God.

The writer of Hebrews was tasked with convincing them of the danger inherent to this way of thinking. ***Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*** (John 14:6). With the coming of Christ, the placeholder was no longer necessary, and the ***first covenant*** had been retired. Gone was the ability for sin to be ritually covered and atoned. Jesus had taken on His person the entirety of all of mankind's transgressions, past, present, and future, and the only way to free oneself from the chains tying one to those transgressions was to accept the cleansing power of His shed blood. There was no contingency plan—no going back. Either you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, or you were lost.

This is as true today as it was then. The Old Testament records the details of God's first Covenant with man, but it does so only so that we might learn of the fullness of His presence.

He wishes us to be able to look backward and recognize Christ from the moment of creation, and to that end, He has given us the totality of His Word. At no time and in no way is He offering us a choice of how to obtain salvation.

There will be times that following the teachings of Jesus will place us at odds with the world in which we live, times that we, just like the early Jewish Christians, might be tempted to take a less 'controversial' path, one that is more in line with modern societal mores and values. This is a temptation that we must resist. There is ONE Covenant standing between God and Man, and ONE way, and only ONE way, that we can avail ourselves of that Covenant. All other paths lead to death.

***Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*** (Acts 4:10-12).

**Thought for the Day:** *There is no alternative path to heaven; God has marked for us the only road.*

**Cross References:** For **Heb. 8:5:** See Ex. 25:40. **Heb. 8:8-12:** See Jer. 31:31-34. **Heb. 9:20-21:** See Ex. 24:8. **Heb. 10:5-7:** See Ps. 40:6-8. **Heb. 10:12-13:** See Ps. 110:1. **Heb. 10:16-17:** See Jer. 31:33-34. **Heb. 10:30:** See Deut. 32:35-36. **Heb. 10:37-38:** See Hab. 2:3-4.

**Word Studies:** 8:10 **New Covenant** = I will . . . write them in their hearts, in contrast to the Old Covenant – written in stone; 9:2 **candlestick** = lamp-stand; 10:33 **gazingstock** = object of public ridicule; 10:36 **patience** = steadfast endurance, trust; 10:39 **perdition** = state of being eternally lost.

**Pray For Bible Pathway Printer:** Pollock Printing, Nashville, TN • **Country:** Libya (6,244,174) North Africa • **Major Languages:** Arabic, Italian, English • **Reports of arrest and imprisonment on the basis of religious belief** • 97% Muslim; 3% Christian • **Prayer Suggestion:** Remember that God hears and answers our prayers (Is. 65:24).



***Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body*** (Heb. 13:1-3).

The Book of Hebrews has given us an intense, in-depth look at the root of our faith. ***Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*** (11:1). We have been reminded that it is through the lens of God-given faith that we recognize the superiority of Christ to the Law (Eph. 1:20-21), acknowledge His position as High Priest (Heb. 5:9-10), and joyfully accept the New Covenant that He has written on our hearts (8:10). We, the body of Christian believers, are called to acknowledge once and for all that Jesus is not a component of our faith—He is the embodiment of it. ***And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell*** (Col. 1:17-19).

Faith is a priceless gift from God (Acts 3:16; Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; II Pet. 1:1) nurtured in the believer's soul by the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Initially, we may refer to faith as a 'belief' or a 'feeling,' but it has to be transformed into action for it to continue to exist inside of us. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph were all men of active faith (Heb. 11:7-21). Isaiah, when he heard the calling of God, stood and answered. ***Also I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me*** (Is. 6:8). Each of these men opened their hearts to God; they converted His gift of faith into faithfulness and, in so doing, played their God-given part in the furthering of the Kingdom of God.

By faith, we lay claim to Jesus Christ and are accepted into the family of God, but this life-changing decision is far from the end of our story. When we live in Christ, we must live AS Christ. ***Let brotherly love continue.*** We are privileged to be joined, as

family, with every other believer. It is one of our greatest joys and responsibilities to be able to give and receive unconditional love within these bonds. Yet we cannot narrow our focus to exclude the outside world, ***for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*** Jesus left no one out. He gladly shared Himself with all that showed a genuine interest (Mark 2:15-17), and we are called to do the same. In this way, we can minister to others while allowing ourselves the blessing of being ministered to by God, and we can freely demonstrate the compassion of Christ. ***Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.*** As God's faithful, it is our job to strengthen and support those who are suffering (regardless of the reason) through the concrete sharing of His love. As we share His grace with others, we will more fully realize the impact that it has on our own lives.

***But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*** (1 Cor. 15:10).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our faith is in Christ; thus, to act in faith is to trust in Him.*

**Cross References:** For **Heb. 11:18:** See Gen. 21:12. **Heb. 12:5-6:** See Prov. 3:11-12. **Heb. 12:12:** See Is. 35:3. **Heb. 12:26:** See Hag. 2:6. **Heb. 13:5:** See Josh. 1:5; also Deut. 31:8. **Heb. 13:6:** See Ps. 118:6.

**Word Studies:** 11:29 **assaying** = attempting; 13:9 **divers** = various.

**Pray For Government Officials:** Sen. Mark Warner (VA), Rep. Lauren Boebert • **Country:** Liechtenstein (37,313) Western Europe • **Major Language:** German • **Religious Freedom** • 75.9% Roman Catholic; 6.5% Protestant Reformed; 5.4% Muslim; 1.3% Lutheran; 1.8% Other; 5.4% None; 2.6% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humble yourself and revere the Word of God; He will look upon you with affection (Is. 66:2).

***Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be*** (James 3:5-10).

The devil's greatest weapon in his ongoing battle to discredit the Word of God is not one that he has any direct control over, but it is one that he takes great pride in. Whenever we open our mouths and speak without first running what we are saying through a godly filter, we dilute our witness for God. Instead of building and enlarging the family of God through the love of Christ, our words destroy, criticize, and tear down those most in need of help. Worse still, due to our publicly recognized status as Christians, our words are attributed to God, and the hearer of those words turns even further away from Him in misplaced disgust and anger. When we use the same tongue to curse our neighbor that we use to bless God, the blessings are quickly forgotten, and the curses are magnified. ***If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain*** (James 1:26). Without ever having to lift a finger, Satan's position in this world is strengthened by those who are sworn to oppose him. ***An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered*** (Prov. 11:9).

***Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*** (Matt. 5:9). Just as our unfiltered words can do incalculable damage, words that we speak from a spirit-filled heart can do infinite good. ***The mouth of the righteous***

***speakeeth wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide*** (Ps. 37:30-31). While we by ourselves may never be able to fully tame our tongue, when we cede control of it to the Holy Spirit, an amazing transformation occurs. The tongue that is controlled by the Holy Spirit can be used to enlighten, edify, encourage, uplift, teach, and counsel. It speaks God's truth in all things, even as it maintains an attitude of Christian love and service. At all times, it brings goodness and righteousness to the members of the body of Christ and shares those same attributes with all who still need His initial mercy and grace. When we keep our tongues in subjection to the will of God, Satan's position in this world is weakened.

***A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*** (Matt. 12:35-37).

**Thought for the Day:** *Representing God is a full-time commitment; Others will judge His message based on our actions.*

**Cross References:** For **James 2:8**: See Lev. 19:18. **James 2:11**: See Ex. 20:13- 14. **James 2:23**: See Gen. 15:6. **James 4:6**: See Prov. 3:34.

**Word Studies:** 1:27 **visit** = care for, look after the needs of; 2:11 **kill** = murder; 3:2 **we offend all** = we all make mistakes and offend others; 3:4 **listeth** = determines; 5:3 **cankered** = tarnished; 5:11 **pitiful** = full of compassion.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Country:** Lithuania (3,505,738) Eastern Europe • Major Language: Lithuanian • Limited Religious Freedom • 77.2% Roman Catholic; 4.1% Russian Orthodox; 0.8% Old Believer; 0.6% Evangelical Lutheran, 0.2% Evangelical Reformist; 0.8% Other (Sunni Muslim, Jewish, Greek Catholic, Karaite); 6.2% None; 10.1% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek God in prayer with your whole heart, and He will hear you (Jer. 29:12-13).

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time** (I Pet. 1:3-5).

How much of a blessing is it for us to know, beyond any shadow of any doubt, that Christ has reserved a room for us in heaven (John 14:2-3)? We have His assurance of **an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled**, and we have been promised that **the power of God** will keep us secure **through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. Having accepted the Good News of Jesus Christ, which Peter was privileged to receive first-hand, each of us may now proudly proclaim: **For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ** (Phil. 4:20).

As he wrote to the suffering churches of Asia Minor, Peter sought to comfort and strengthen them by reminding them of the reality of a life lived in Christ. His audience knew all too well the dangers of living in a fallen world. As gentiles that had only recently been rescued from the world through the shed blood of Jesus (I Pet. 1:19; 2:9-10), they had all once been guilty of worldly lusts performed out of ignorance (1:14), but now they knew better. They still lived physically within the world, but their home was already with God. **Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation** (2:11-12).

Their transformation had not gone unnoticed by their unsaved neighbors, and they had endured ridicule, harassment, and persecution. Instead of commiserating with them, Peter praised their good fortune. **For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering**

**wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God (2:19-20).** By consciously choosing to live as Christ had lived, eschewing their own comforts and safety in favor of living as a witness for Him, they were ensuring that they would one day hear: **Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).**

Christians today are living in an increasingly hostile world. Ridicule, harassment, and even outright persecution against those who strictly adhere to the Word of God are on the rise. God's message for us now is the same as it was in the time of the early church. Persevere. Live up to the standards set by Christ, giving no man any reason to question your honesty, ethics, or morals. **For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Pet. 2:15).** Above all else, allow the love of God to guide you in all things. In this, you will find peace.

**And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).**

**Thought for the Day:** *To follow Christ is to walk in the opposite direction of the crowd; it does not go unnoticed, and it is impossible to avoid running into people.*

**Cross References:** For **I Pet. 1:16:** See Lev. 11:44-45. **I Pet. 1:24-25:** See Is. 40:6-8. **I Pet. 2:6-7:** See Is. 28:16; Ps. 118:22. **I Pet. 2:22:** See Is. 53:9. **I Pet. 2:24-25:** See Is. 53:4-6,12.

**Word Studies:** 1:17 **sojourning** = temporarily residing; 2:2 **sincere** = perfect, pure, without a mixture; 2:4 **disallowed** = rejected; 2:19 **thankworthy** = accept- able, something we should give thanks for.

**Pray for Government Official:** Rep. Tracey Mann (KS), Rep. Donald Payne Jr. (NJ), Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (PA), • **Country:** Luxembourg (520,672) Western Europe • Major Languages: Luxembourgish, French, German • Religious Freedom • 87% Roman Catholic; 13% Other (Protestant, Jewish, Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Know that the Lord is loving and merciful to His children (Jer. 31:9).

***Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (I Pet. 5:2-5).***

***So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs*** (John 21:15). Before ascending into heaven, Jesus had entreated Peter to ***Feed My lambs***. With boundless love and infinite trust, Jesus had placed His most precious possessions in Peter's care. This was a lot for Peter to take in at the time. Passionate and headstrong, Peter had been the disciple most likely to get caught up in the moment's emotions and speak or act without measured thought. Jesus, however, saw through the outer impetuosity to the heart beneath it, and it was to that heart that He entrusted His flock. Today's reading allows us to fully see the Peter that Jesus saw.

Peter's words here are nothing new. If we take it verse for verse, we will soon realize that Peter's purpose here was to empower and instruct the next generation of leaders to take up the charge in precisely the same fashion in which Jesus had empowered and instructed him. When Peter bade the ***elder*** to lead, not as ***lords***, but by ***being ensamples to the flock***, and the ***younger*** to ***submit yourselves unto the elder***, he did so with a complete understanding of their positions and needs. He who had learned true humility at the feet of Jesus now sought to impart that same gift to others.

Peter urged the ***elders*** to search their hearts and ensure that they undertook the ministry of God's people willingly, embracing any and all hardships that it might entail, knowing that if they undertook this calling for any reason other than an



all-encompassing love for their Savior that they would falter at the first sign trouble and the people would be cast adrift. No amount of **filthy lucre** (promise of financial gain) or desire for earthly power would ever be enough to compel them to risk everything to care for God's children.

Peter viewed the **younger** members of the congregation with compassion, likely seeing in many of them the image of himself as he first was when he had been drawn to his Master's side. Peter's statement that **God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble** was not offered from the perspective of an abstract spiritual lesson but rather as a witness born of personal experience. Peter knew that in order to fully serve the Lord, these men needed to look beyond their own narrow views of what was right and proper and open their hearts to God's truth, just as he himself had done. He also knew that the first step to opening their hearts was to willingly submit themselves to the authority of those God had placed over them. They had to trust that God knew what He was doing, even if it was beyond their understanding, and surrender themselves to His will.

**Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you** (Heb. 13:17).

**Thought for the Day:** *The more hurdles we overcome in our own spiritual journey, the more we can assist others in theirs.*

**Cross References:** For **I Pet. 3:10-12:** See Ps. 34:12-16. **I Pet. 5:5:** See Prov. 3:34.

**Word Studies:** 3:11 **eschew** = turn away from; **ensue** = earnestly pursue; 3:20 **were saved by water** = were saved from the water by entering the ark (that illustrates Christ); 4:15 **busybody** = one who interferes in other people's affairs that do not concern him.

**Pray For Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Official:** Rep. Bill Posey (FL), Rep. Jared Moskowitz (FL) • **Country:** Macau (587,914) Eastern Asia • Religious Freedom • 50% Buddhist; 15% Catholic; 35% None/Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Express your gratitude for the loving-kindness of God (Jer. 32:17-18).

***Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (II Pet. 3:3-10).***

At the time of the writing of II Peter, Jesus had been physically gone from the earth for a little over thirty years, and there was a growing body of so-called believers who were starting to question the validity of what they had been taught. They viewed the world around them through jaded eyes. Nothing had changed. Nothing was changing. They openly scoffed at the idea of Christ returning after so long, and they argued that the message of a second coming heralding the ultimate, final judgment of God was detrimental to the well-being of the church as a whole. ***Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*** They preached of the natural order of God's creation and urged others to live their lives ***after their own lusts*** (in the manner they felt right) without fear of supernatural spiritual reprisal.

Now, over two millennia after the time of Christ, that false

message has been spread far and wide. Variations on the theme include: God created the world, established the natural order, and is now leaving us alone to do with it as we will; God's mercy and grace mean nothing is required of us, and no judgment is forthcoming—stating we are His means that we are, and we can do so on our own terms without fear of reprisal; and the Biblical story of the resurrection and the description of the second coming are metaphors for our renewed relationship with the Lord.

All of the above 'beliefs' are patently false and spiritually lethal. We cannot pick and choose what of God's Word to believe; either all of it is true or none of it is. In today's reading, Peter stresses that living in His grace means looking toward the future while simultaneously learning from the past. God is the only one who sees the whole picture and knows the exact timeline; every promise He has made to us will come to pass. We must guard our hearts and minds against those who twist portions of His Word to fit their message (3:16) and instead trust in the whole truth as revealed to us through the entirety of His Word and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

***Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (II Pet. 3:17)***

**Thought for the Day:** *Faith is not about patiently waiting for Jesus's return; it is about living and acting with certainty that it will happen.*

**Cross Reference:** For **II Pet. 2:15**: See Num. 22:5,7. **II Pet. 2:22**: See Prov. 26:11.

**Word Studies:** 2:7 **vexed** = distressed; **filthy conversation** = immoral conduct; 3:16 **wrest** = distort.

**Pray For Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Adrian Smith (NE), Rep. Pat Fallon (TX) • **Country:** Macedonia (2,091,719) Southeastern Europe • Major Languages: Macedonian, Albanian • Strongly Orthodox Country • 64.7% Macedonian Orthodox; 33.3% Muslim; 0.37% Other; 1.63% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Call unto the Lord, and He will give you strength to overcome (Jer. 33:3).

***This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (I John 1:5-7).***

It is not enough for us to ‘claim’ fellowship with God. Salvation is not something we can give ourselves; merely labeling ourselves ‘saved’ does not make it so. It cannot be bargained for, earned, bought, or stolen; if it has not been freely given to us by God, then we do not have it. ***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*** (Eph. 2:8).

So, how can we know if we are genuinely saved? How can we tell if we really have a relationship with God or are just playing a part? We look to our hearts and the motivations we find there. ***Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates*** (II Cor. 13:5)? Are our days buoyed by grace and directed by love, or are our actions influenced by a sense of entitlement and self-promotion? Do we share the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) freely with everyone we come across, regardless of who they are or where they are on their own spiritual journey, or do we pick and choose who we believe worthy of our kindness and ignore the rest? Do we get up every day seeking God’s will so that we know how to align our lives, or do we regularly search God’s Word for validation of our personal choices? Are we really standing in the light, or have we set up artificial lighting to disguise the darkness surrounding us?

These questions are not easy, but it is vital that we give them full consideration and then answer them honestly, even if we don’t like the answer. ***If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*** God’s Word is crystal clear on the subject. Anyone who has entered into the body of Christ has been reborn. ***Therefore***

***if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*** (II Cor. 5:17). A child of God has been cleansed of darkness and enfolded in the light—still fallible, imperfect, and vulnerable to human weakness and temptations—but always, always working for the glory of God. If, after intense self-reflection, this is not where you find yourself, but it is where you want to be, then let go of the lies, quit trying to do it yourself, and turn to God. He is waiting to welcome you in, and once He does, He will never let you go.

***Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*** (Matt. 7:21-23).

**Thought for the Day:** *Much like our fear of sin, we cannot allow our hope for salvation to preoccupy us and avert our eyes from God.*

**Cross References:** For **I John 1:8**: See Eccl. 7:20. **I John 3:12**: See Gen. 4:8.

**Word Studies:** 2:3 **keep** = guard with our lives and obey; 2:20 **Unction** = Anointing of the Holy Spirit. This is how we can know all things (2:20); 3:9 **His Seed** = Jesus, the Word of God (Gal. 3:16; John 1:1-14; Luke 8:11).

**Pray For Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Country:** Madagascar (23,201926) Southern Africa • Major Languages: French, Malagasy • Increasingly anti-Christian • 52% Indigenous Beliefs; 41% Christian; 7% Muslim • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pour out your heart in prayer to the Lord for your children (Lam. 2:19).

**W**hosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth Him also that is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (I John 5:1-4).

**He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love (4:8).**

If we were pressed to find a thesis statement for the Book of I John, this would be it. In five short chapters, the love of God is referenced over 40 times. The word love, as it is put forth here by John, is not mentioned as a passive emotional state. Instead, it represents the all-encompassing presence of God. He is not a loving God; He **is love**. Every action He takes is taken in love because love is the essence of His being.

Because God is love, it should come as no surprise to us that we, as His children, are expected to live within that love. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.** Jesus' commandments were simple and direct. **Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets** (Matt. 22:37-40). Only by taking on the essence of God (love) can we assume our rightful place in the family of God.

Godly love is not an emotion; it is an action. Love is never motionless; it is never paralyzed by fear. Love is never motivated by personal needs or desires. Jesus suffered and died for us, yet even before His terrible death on the cross, He gave us everything He had. He showed love and compassion to everyone He encountered, asking nothing in return. How many of us are willing to do the same?

It is easy for us today to talk of Christian love, but acting in

love is rarely that simple. We happily chip in when our group sponsors a Salvation Army ‘angel,’ or we add that extra dollar to the check-out total for the Children's Miracle Network drive. We then pat ourselves on the back because we are acting in the spirit of Christ, but what did we really accomplish? Was love shown, or were we just showcasing our charitable nature? When was the last time we gave, not because we had extra, but simply because someone else had none? Honest Christian love is shown by placing the needs of others ahead of our own. When we do this, an amazing thing happens. Instead of feeling overworked and underappreciated, we become flooded with an overwhelming sense of peace and satisfaction. As we make a difference in the lives of others, God’s love pours forth and envelops us, and our joy becomes full.

***These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you*** (John 15:11-12).

**Thought for the Day:** *The sacrifice incurred by Godly love only makes room for the warmth of the giving spirit.*

**Word Studies:** 5:18 **he that is begotten of God keepeth himself** = he that is saved will not become involved in sinful activities.

**Pray For Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Official:** Rep. Zoe Lofgren (CA) • **Country:** Malawi (17,377,468) in Southeastern Africa • Major Languages: English, Chichewa • Religious Freedom • 82.6% Christian; 13% Muslim; 1.9% Other; 2.5% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Praise the Lord for His faithfulness and mercy (Lam. 3:22-23).



***Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*** (III John 1:2-4).

If we could give our children, family, or friends any advantage in the world, what would it be? If we could guarantee that any one aspect of their lives could be 100% perfect 100% of the time, what would we pick? For John, the answer to this question came easily. ***I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*** Everything else was secondary to this. As he rejoiced over the state of Gaius' soul, he also expressed a hope that his letter found his friend both prosperous and healthy, but John's joy would not have dimmed even if he had found him on his deathbed. Gaius was right with God, and John could find ***no greater joy.***

In recent years, there have been those who have read these verses from III John and attempted to divert the focus from John's ***joy*** in Gaius' personal relationship with God to John's salutatory ***wish*** that his friend be prosperous and in good health. They have convinced themselves and are working to persuade others that John's words are representative of an if/then promise from God. They interpret John's greeting in verse 1:2 as a promised blessing to Gaius. They claim that John's words prove that the Lord desires for His Children to enjoy good health and worldly prosperity in equal measure to their faith. While it is easy to see how this idea could gain a substantial following in today's overly materialistic society, what does God's Word have to say on the subject?

***And He*** (Jesus) ***said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*** (Luke 12:15). Jesus' position on the dangers associated with the accumulation of wealth is well documented. ***For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*** (Luke 18:25). Not

only did He warn against it, He eschewed it for himself. ***And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*** (Matt. 8:20). Jesus taught us to seek spiritual treasures and to guard against allowing our hearts to be distracted by earthly possessions. ***Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*** (6:19-21). Jesus never once equated godly blessings with earthly prosperity; neither should we.

***Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But 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 raiment let us be therewith content*** (I Tim. 6:5-8).

**Thought for the Day:** *To walk with God is to attain entrance to the kingdom of heaven; there is no greater prosperity to be found.*

**Cross References:** For **Jude 1:5:** See Num. 14:28-35. **Jude 1:7:** See Gen. 19:24. **Jude 1:11:** See Gen. 4:3-8, Num. 16:1-3,31-35; 31:8-16. **Jude 1:23:** See Zech. 3:2.

**Word Studies:** III John 1:10 **prating against** = falsely accusing; Jude 1:4 **turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness** = perverting the grace of God to permit immodesty, immorality, lustfulness.

**Pray For Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Official:** Rep. Barry Loudermilk (GA), Sen. Ted Cruz (TX) • **Country:** Malaysia (30,073,353) Southeast Asia • Major Languages: Bahasa Malay • All Christian witness to Muslims is illegal • 60.4% Muslim; 19.2% Buddhist; 9.1% Christian; 6.3% Hindu; 2.6% Confucianism, Taoism Other Traditional Chinese Religions; 1.5% Other/Unknown; 0.8% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Lift up your heart to God in prayer (Lam. 3:41)

***He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*** (Rev. 2:7).

Following the execution of the Apostle Paul, intense persecution broke out against all Christians. At some point during these tribulations, the aged Apostle John was imprisoned on Patmos (1:9), a small, rocky island about ten miles long and six miles wide, which lies about 35 miles off the southwest coast of modern-day Turkey. It was during this imprisonment that John was exceedingly blessed to receive ***The Revelation of Jesus Christ*** (1:1), a personal message of encouragement, warning, and promise authored by Jesus Himself. To begin His revelation, Jesus dictated letters to seven churches located in various cities within Asia Minor (Turkey). Although each letter had an intended recipient, Jesus spoke in such a manner as to include all Christians from any generation.

The letters to the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia contained nothing but praise, while the letters to the churches at Sardis and Laodicea contained only condemnation and warning. The other three, written to churches in Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira, were a mixture of praise and reproof. As children of the Living God, it is our responsibility to read each of these letters through the filter of the Holy Spirit so that we might truly ***hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*** and that we might find in His Words the power to ***overcome(th)***.

From the church at Ephesus, we are charged with learning that love is the key to spiritual consistency. Jesus praised their sound doctrine and their tireless works in His name (2:2-3) but cautioned them about their flagging devotion (2:4). He warned that if they allowed their love to continue to fade, then soon too would their obedience, and, in the end, they would turn away and be removed from His service (2:5).

Next came the church at Smyrna, from where we are provided a living example of spiritual richness. Beset by tribulations and suffering the trials of physical poverty, this congregation never wavered in its love and service to the Lord (2:9-10). To these

people, Christ offered encouragement and a reminder of the surety of His promise of life everlasting (2:10).

This is followed by the letter to the church at Pergamos, in which we are introduced to the danger of spiritual compromise. This church had held fast to the name of Jesus and had not denied their faith (2:13), but they had also allowed idolatry to continue unchecked in their midst, adopting a 'live and let live' policy (2:14-15). To this church, Jesus issued a grave warning. Through compromise, they had avoided much of the hardships endured by the church at Smyrna, but by living hand in hand with evil, they also continuously ran the risk of succumbing to it. If this were to happen, they would soon find themselves fighting against Christ rather than for Him (2:16).

The final letter in today's reading addresses the church at Thyatira. From this congregation, we learn of the dangers associated with the acceptance of sin by the body of Christ. Jesus began by acknowledging their spiritual growth, works, and faithful service (2:19), but He took issue with the fact that they were allowing self-styled 'leaders' of the church to continue in blatant sin, unchecked and unabated. He warned that all who fell victim to the teachings of the unrepentant sinner would share her fate in the end (2:20-23).

***Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God*** (1 John 5: 5)?

**Thought for the Day:** *The difficulty of the path in front of us is determined by many things and is oftentimes out of our control, but with God as our guide, it will always be navigable.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 1:5:** See Ps. 89:27. **Rev. 1:6:** See Ex. 19:6. **Rev. 1:7:** See Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10. **Rev. 2:7:** See Gen. 2:9. **Rev. 2:23:** See Jer. 17:10. **Rev. 2:27:** See Ps. 2:9.

**Word Studies:** 1:8 **I am Alpha and Omega** = I am the First of all things and the End of all things and know all things A to Z; 1:13 **girt** = wrapped around..

**Pray For Government Officials:** Rep. Yadira Caraveo (CO), Rep. Morgan McGarvey (KY), Rep. Michael Burgess (TX) • **Country:** Maldives (393,595) Southern Asia • Major Languages: Dhivehi, English • Christian witnessing is banned • Sunni Muslim (Official) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for godly discernment to know His will (Ezek. 44:23).

***After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in Heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold*** (Rev. 4:1-4).

In chapter 4 of the Book of Revelation, we are treated to a glorious description of John's first glimpse of God's heavenly throne room. After dictating the letters to the seven churches, Jesus (Rev. 1:1,10-11) drew John upward in ***the spirit*** and stood him in the doorway of the throne room. This was done in preparation for showing John the vision of ***things which must be hereafter***.

The first thing that caught John's attention upon arrival was the occupied throne in the center of his vision. The ***One*** who ***sat on the throne*** is described only in terms of His brilliant glory. He was substantial yet precious, ***like a jasper and a sardine stone***. A radiant rainbow light of prismatic emerald shone around him, symbolizing His grace and the covenant of mercy He maintained with His creation. This throne was the focal point of all John could see. The other beings in the room were of more precise shape and form to John's eye and thus were easier to describe in detail, but none held the power or attraction of the centered throne of God, on which all of the satellite beings' attention also rested.

This chapter is a gift designed to remind us of the true purpose of creation. ***Even every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him*** (Is. 43:7). We are here for one reason and one reason only: to bring glory to God. There is no higher calling, no greater satisfaction, and no loftier goal than to kneel

in His presence in continuous worship. The god of the world (II Cor. 4:4) will inundate us with distractions and temptations, seeking to draw our attention, but God's Word has given us the tools needed to cling to the Spirit and look past Satan straight into the throne room of God. ***For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*** (II Cor. 4:6). God sits on His throne—His radiance indescribable, and His love never-ending. Look to Him, and never turn away.

***And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*** (Rev. 4:9-11).

**Thought for the Day:** *We cannot thrive without God's light in the same way that a plant cannot live without the sun.*

**Cross Reference:** For **Rev. 3:5:** See Ex. 32:32. **Rev. 3:12:** See Is. 62:2. **Rev. 4:2-3:** See Ezek. 1:28. **Rev. 4:5:** See Zech. 4:2. **Rev. 4:6:** See Ezek. 1:22. **Rev. 4:7:** See Ezek. 1:10. **Rev. 4:8:** See Is. 6:2-3.

**Word Studies:** 3:20 **sup** = feast, share spiritual food and fellowship; 4:6 **beasts** = living ones.

**Pray For Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Country:** Mali (16,455,903) West Africa • Major Languages: French, Bambara • Religious Freedom • 94.8% Muslim; 2.4% Christian; 2% Animist; 0.5% None; 0.3% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray daily to your Father in heaven (Dan. 6:10).

***And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the Arich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Rev. 6:15-17)?***

Seven hundred years before the first coming of the Lamb, Isaiah revealed that the administration of justice would rest upon the shoulders of the Messiah-King. ***For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this*** (Is. 9:6-7).

Isaiah also foretold that Christ would be led as a lamb unto slaughter, carrying upon his shoulders the entirety of the sins of mankind (53:6-7) and becoming the perfect, permanent, final sacrifice for the remittance of sins, an identity that was later confirmed by the words of John the Baptist. ***The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*** (John 1:29).

During His first appearance on this earth, Christ, the Lamb of God, offered the gentleness of God's love to all willing to receive Him as their Savior and Lord. This offer of limitless mercy and grace has been open for the past 2000 years, and it will remain open to all who choose to accept it until, in God's perfect time, the day of the Lord arrives. ***But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*** (Mark 13:32). Yet on ***the great day of His wrath***, on judgment day, all who have refused His love and have willfully chosen to remain under the control of Satan in rebellion against God will tremble and fall



to their knees in belated acknowledgment and fear, ***for who shall be able to stand*** in His terrible presence? ***Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and His angels*** (Matt. 25:41).

As true believers, we will have quite a different experience! ***After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*** (Rev. 7:9-10). Our names have been written in the Lambs Book of Life (Rev. 20:15; 21:27), and we have been promised the privilege of living in the presence of the King of kings for all eternity.

Today, as we bow our heads and give thanks for the heavenly birth of a small babe in Bethlehem, let us also raise our voices in prayer and praise. The reign of Satan has ended; All hail our Savior and King!

***But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*** (1 Cor. 15:57).

**Thought for the Day:** *For God's faithful, Judgment Day is not a calamity but a victory.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 6:12:** See Joel 2:31. **Rev. 6:13:** See Is. 34:4. **Rev. 6:17:** See Joel 2:11. **Rev. 7:3:** See Ezek. 9:4. **Rev. 7:17:** See Ezek. 34:23.

**Word Studies:** 6:13 **untimely figs** = unripe figs; 6:15 **bondman** = slave.

**Pray For:** God's Peace throughout the world • **Country:** Malta (412,655) Islands South of Sicily • Major Languages: Maltese, English • Religious Freedom • 98% Roman Catholic (Official); 2% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Confess your sins to the Lord; He is merciful and forgiving (Dan. 9:4-9).

***And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not (Rev. 10:1-4).***

Chapter 10 of the Book of Revelation offers us a brief respite from the stark images on display in the chapters that stand to both sides of it. Chapter 9 bears witness to the opening of the pit of hell and the monsters that pour forth as a result. ***And He opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power (Rev. 9:2-3).*** Chapter 11 describes the ministry and fate of the Lord's two final witnesses to mankind. ***And I will give power unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth (11:3). And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them (11:7).*** While both of these chapters ultimately underscore the absolute authority of God over all things, they also can be somewhat disconcerting to read. Chapter 10 gives us a moment to simply stand in the presence of God's messenger, reflect on what has been revealed thus far, and prepare ourselves for what is yet to come.

As the ***mighty angel*** stands with ***his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth***, we are forcibly reminded of the all-encompassing power of our Lord. When he opens his mouth and cries out with the roar of a lion, imparting a truth

too glorious for our ears to yet hear, we are reminded that in God's time, and God's time only, all will be revealed. We can draw comfort from the fact that God doesn't expect us to know everything and still rest secure in the knowledge that He does.

As its last gift to us, Chapter 10 reminds us of the potency of God's Word and its essential place in the life of every believer. It enters into us with sweetness, at once filling us with the grace and glory of our God. Then, it digs its way further inward and goes to work, transforming us from the inside out. Though this process may sometimes be bitter and uncomfortable, it is the most important experience of our lives. It is one that we must endure, and having endured, we will be cleansed and ready to take our place in God's eternal court.

***The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon (Ps. 29:3-5).***

**Thought for the Day:** *Revelation depicts chaos and upheaval throughout the world, but it will only be chaos to eyes that don't perceive the hand of God at work.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 9:2**: See Joel 2:10. **Rev. 9:4**: See Ex. 12:23. **Rev. 9:6**: See Jer. 8:3. **Rev. 9:7**: See Joel 2:4. **Rev. 9:8**: See Joel 1:6. **Rev. 9:9**: See Joel 2:5-7. **Rev. 10:6**: See Neh. 9:6. **Rev. 11:4**: See Zech. 4:2-3, 11-12, 14. **Rev. 11:11**: See Ezek. 37:5.

**Word Studies:** 9:11 **Abaddon** (Apollyon or destroyer) = satanic angel and king of the abyss reserved for the wicked; 10:6 **time no longer** = no more delay.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Country:** Marshall Islands (70,983) North Pacific Ocean • Religious Freedom • 80.6% Protestant; 8.4% Roman Catholic; 2.8% Bukot Nan Jesus; 2.1% Mormon; 3.6% Other Christian; 1% Other; 1.5% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Commit your fears to the Lord; He will give you peace and strength (Dan. 10:19).

***And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear*** (Rev. 13:3-9).

***I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive*** (John. 5:23). When it comes to the end times, there is little Christians fear more than the final antichrist and his false prophet, described in detail here in Revelation, chapter 13. It is not the turmoil of his reign we fear, or even the level of suffering we might experience at his hands. More than anything else, we fear being deceived by Him. We are afraid he will slip past our defenses and capture our loyalty without our ever recognizing him. We worry that we will be tricked into turning our backs on God and accepting the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-18). Our greatest fear is that, somehow, in the end times, Satan will gain the power to do the impossible, and he will slide in and steal our salvation away.

A closer look at today's reading proves this fear to be baseless. ***And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*** The antichrist is coming to separate the pretenders from the faithful, not the faithful from Christ. Satan's plan might

be to entice us away, but God's power over Satan will not allow that plan to come to fruition. For those who have truly been reborn and entered into the body of Christ, the farce playing out in front of us will be obvious. Though plenty of self-identified Christians will be caught up in the deception, there will not be a single case of true salvation lost. ***And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day*** (John 6:39).

Instead of wasting our time worrying about Satan's attempts to deceive us, our time would be much better spent examining our own hearts for possible self-deception. Have we really surrendered all to Christ and become wholly His, or are we merely playing a part? And be sure to answer honestly; even the tiniest lie here could have eternal consequences.

***Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*** (Thess. 2:9-12).

**Thought for the Day:** *Ultimately, all Satan can do is steal our attention from God; unfortunately allowing him to is all he would need us to do.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 12:5**: See Is. 66:7. **Rev. 12:14**: See Ex. 19:4. **Rev. 13:1**: See Dan. 7:8,24. **Rev. 13:5**: See Dan. 7:8.

**Word Studies:** 12:6 **threescore** = 60; 12:17 **wroth** = furious.

**Pray For Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Country:** Mauritania (3,516,806) Western Africa • Major Language: Arabic • Islamic state with no mission work allowed • 100% Muslim (predominantly Sunni) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek the Lord's forgiveness with a repentant heart, knowing that God will graciously receive you (Hos. 14:1-2).

***And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus (Rev. 16:1-5).***

With the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the seven last, terrible plagues of God will be released ***upon the earth*** (Rev. 15:1; 16:1). Unlike the curses preluded by the blowing of the first five trumpets which will affect the world by thirds, these plagues will world-wide. ***All men which had the mark of the beast*** will suffer, ***every living soul*** will die ***in the sea***, and all ***rivers and fountains of waters*** will become ***blood***. As the world as we know it begins to draw to a close, God will use these plagues to illustrate the terrible and glorious truth that so many today deny: God has no need for man, but man cannot exist without God.

The verses in today's reading make one thing abundantly clear. For those who refuse to accept God's grace, His judgment is coming, and it will be eternally binding. ***Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus.*** If we choose to stand with the beast, then there will be no escape. As terrifying as the images of the final plagues are, they are nothing compared to what will come afterward. Not oblivion, but rather an eternity of torment spent locked away from the presence of Almighty God. ***And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name*** (Rev. 14:11).

The good news is that no matter how horrifying this seems to us, it is really none of our concern. This is descriptive of the future—but not our future. ***And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads*** (Rev. 7:2-3). As members of the body of Christ and faithful children of our almighty God, we do not have to understand or prepare for the plagues that will come to earth. We are sealed by Christ and saved by the blood of the Lamb of God. We have nothing to fear.

***He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust (Ps. 91:1-2). Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways (Ps. 91:9-11).***

**Thought for the Day:** *The conclusion of God's Word is not a threat; instead, it represents the total fulfillment of all His promises. If we have built our lives upon these promises, then we have nothing to fear.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 14:7:** See Ps. 146:6. **Rev. 14:8:** See Is. 21:9. **Rev. 14:10:** See Jer. 25:15; 51:7. **Rev. 14:15:** See Joel 3:13. **Rev. 14:20:** See Is. 63:3. **Rev. 15:1:** See Lev. 26:21. **Rev. 15:4:** Ps. 86:9; Is. 66:23; Jer. 10:7. **Rev. 15:8:** See I Kin. 8:10-11.

**Word Studies:** 14:5 **no guile** = no lie or deception; 15:7 **vials** = bowls or cups.

**Pray For Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Gov. Katie Hobbs (AZ), Gov. Kevin Stitt (OK), Rep. August Pfluger (TX), Jennifer McClellan (VA) • **Country:** Mauritius (1,331,155) Southern Africa • **Major Language:** Creole • **Religious Freedom** • 48.5% Hindu; 26.3% Roman Catholic; 17.3% Muslim; 6.4% Protestant; 0.7% Other; 0.7% None; 0.1% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Fast, sanctify yourself, and unite in prayer with others as you cry unto the Lord (Joel 1:14).



***So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH*** (Rev. 17:3-5).

Over one-eighth of the entire Book of Revelation, about 65 verses, is devoted to the subject of judgment upon Babylon (14:8-19; 16:17—19:5). Although these verses can at times be challenging to understand, they (along with the rest of His Word) are given to us by God so that we may learn more about Him and His plans and expectations for our lives. For this reason, it is vital that we pray for spiritual guidance and discernment as we read and study these passages.

Old Testament Babylon was the ancient world's most magnificent and influential capital city. It was also one of the most decadent and sinful cities of its time. In referring to ***Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots***, Jesus illustrates the God-defying forces in politics and religion that will be in effect during the end times. This federation of churches, world religions, and world governments will fully support the one-world political and economic system called the ***scarlet coloured beast***, which will be ruled by the Antichrist.

The image of the ***Mother of Harlots*** sitting astride the ***beast*** represents the close alliance between the world government, led by the ***beast***, and the harlot, ***Babylon***, which will proclaim itself the true Church. Babylon is referred to as ***the great whore*** (17:1) — symbolic of an unfaithful wife — because it has become unfaithful to God by accepting the gods of false churches and religions as the One True God under a different name. It is an apostate 'Christianity' that denies ***Jesus Christ's statement, Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*** (John 14:6).

This false bride of Christ (false church) will rise to great power before it falls because it controls the governments of the world which support its false worship. ***And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*** (Rev. 17:18).

***I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues*** (18:4). God has given us ample warning against the deceptions that are to come. ***Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*** (Matt. 7:14). Through His Word, He has given us all the information we need to find the ***strait*** and ***narrow way, the gate*** that has been opened by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As long as we faithfully follow Him, He will guide us safely home (John 10:27-28).

***These*** (the ungodly forces of the world) ***shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful*** (Rev. 17:14).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our future will never be dark if Christ lights the way.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 17:4:** See Jer. 51:7. **Rev. 17:12:** See Dan. 7:20-24. **Rev. 17:14:** See Dan. 2:47. **Rev. 18:2:** See Jer. 50:39; Is. 21:9. **Rev. 18:5:** See Jer. 51:9. **Rev. 18:7-8:** See Is. 47:7-8; Zeph. 2:15. **Rev. 18:22:** See Ezek. 26:13. **Rev. 18:24:** See Jer. 51:49.

**Word Studies:** 17:8 **perdition** = destruction; 18:2 **Babylon** (from "Babel") = confusion (Gen. 11:9). It is the name God chose for Satan's great earth system of religion and world government. The true Church is warned to come out of her (18:4-5).

**Pray For Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Mexico (120,286,655) North America • **Major Language:** Spanish • **Religious Freedom:** 82.7% Roman Catholic; 6.6% Protestant; 1.4% Jehovah Witness; 4.7% None; 1.9% Other; 2.7% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** The promises of God should be an encouragement to you to seek God in prayer (Amos 5:4,6).

*And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh (Rev. 19:17-21).*

Chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation ends in a flood of graphic imagery. The final battle has been fought, and evil has been defeated. The beast (the final antichrist) and his false prophet have been seized and **cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone**. All who fought with the beast against God—the **kings, captains, and mighty men**, as well as the ordinary people, **both free and bond**—are dead, slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, and their bodies lie rotting in the battlefield. Prior to the start of the great battle, God's angel summoned great flocks of carrion birds to hover over the battlefield in anticipation of the feast to come. As the chapter closes, the birds swoop in and devour all of the previously living flesh.

These are not pleasant passages to contemplate; nevertheless, we would do ourselves and those to whom we have been called to witness a grave disservice if we chose to gloss over their violent nature or skip them entirely. While salvation by God's grace and boundless love is and always should be the primary message we carry with us out into the world, it is vital

that we remain open and honest about what awaits all those who refuse it. The choice is not a life with or without God; the choice is either eternal life with God or utter destruction and damnation without Him. ***And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*** (Rev. 20:14-15).

It is impossible to scare someone into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and attempting to do so frequently does more harm than good. But unless we are willing to share all that God has revealed to us of the future, the good and the bad, then we are denying them the right to make an informed choice. It is not fearmongering to warn others of imminent danger; it is the ultimate act of love.

***And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power*** (II Thess. 1:7-9).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our eyes can adjust to the dark, but we still cannot truly see, so it is to live without God; we exist, but we do not truly live.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 19:2:** See Ps. 19:9; Deut. 32:43; II Kin. 9:7. **Rev. 19:5:** See Ps. 115:13. **Rev. 19:11:** See Ps. 96:13. **Rev. 19:16:** See Deut. 10:17. **Rev. 19:18:** See Ezek. 39:4. **Rev. 20:2-3:** See Is. 24:22. **Rev. 20:8:** See Ezek. 38:2,15. **Rev. 20:12:** See Dan. 7:10.

**Word Studies:** 19:6 **Omnipotent** = All-Powerful; 19:13 **vesture** = robe; 20:9 **compassed** = surrounded.

**Pray For** lost loved ones • **Government Officials:** Rep. Michael Bost (IL), Rep. Tom Tiffany (WI), Gov. Janet Mills (MA) • **Country:** Micronesia, Federated States of (105,681) North Pacific Ocean • **Religious Freedom** • 52.7% Roman Catholic; 42.7% Protestant; 3.8% Other; 0.8% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray when distressed and afflicted (Jon. 2:2).

***And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God (Rev. 21:1-3).***

Here, in the last chapters of Revelation, we have been given a most precious gift. Through the visions granted to John, Jesus has provided us with assurance of the righteousness of our faith. We have arrived at the end of His written Word only to be shown the true beginning. Though we now live in a world of temptation and trials, in the ***new heaven and the new earth***, these manifestations of evil will not exist. ***But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (21:8).*** From that moment on into eternity, we will live in the perfect will of our Father. ***He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be His God, and he shall be My son (21:7).***

Even as we ready ourselves to live forever in the presence of God, many in the world today still walk in total darkness, blind to the light of Christ. ***In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (II Cor. 4:4).*** They know nothing of peace; they have never felt the love of God nor perceived His outstretched arms. They are in desperate need of spiritual intervention, and the power to offer it lies in our hands.

***So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).*** Tomorrow, as we celebrate the beginning of a new year by setting out on a fresh journey through ***the word of God***, let us resolve not to take that journey alone. ***How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?***

***and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things (10:14-15)!***

As we absorb the living force of God's Word on a daily basis, let us make it our mission to spread that force far and wide so that all might come to know the saving power of God.

***Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations (Ps. 100:1-5).***

**Thought for the Day:** *To take God's gift and horde it away is to ignore the reason it was given. God's Word is meant to be given to all.*

**Cross References:** For **Rev. 21:4**: See Is. 25:8. **Rev. 21:23**: See Is. 60:19. **Rev. 21:25**: See Is. 60:11. **Rev. 21:27**: See Is. 52:1. **Rev. 22:2**: See Ezek. 47:12; Gen. 2:9. **Rev. 22:3**: See Zech. 14:11. **Rev. 22:12**: See Is. 40:10. **Rev. 22:13**: See Is. 44:6; 48:12. **Rev. 22:16**: See Is. 11:1. **Rev. 22:18-19**: See Deut. 12:32.

**Word Studies:** 21:9 **The bride, the Lamb's wife** = The Church, the Lord Jesus' Church; 21:16 **twelve thousand furlongs** = 1500 miles; 21:23 **lighten it** = illuminate it; 22:7 **prophecy** = foretelling, forth telling, teaching; 22:16 **angel to testify** = messenger to bear witness.

**Pray For:** The United States Armed Forces Worldwide • **Government Officials:** Gov. Jim Pillen (NE) • **Country:** Moldova (3,583,288) Southeastern Europe • Major Language: Moldovan • Restricts Religious Freedom • 98% Eastern Orthodox; 1.5% Jewish; 0.5% Baptist/ Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek the Lord when in despair; He is your deliverer (Jon. 2:5-6).

# Notes

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