

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith and Holiness

2019

Joan H. Richardson

The UNION

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by Joan H. Richardson

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CHAPTER 12

An Incomplete Gospel

⁵⁷ Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

⁵⁹ Then He said to another, "Follow Me."

But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

⁶¹ And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house."

⁶² But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
(Luke 9:57-62 NKJV)

Grace Alone?

Those called to evangelism should look to the Author of our faith for wisdom and understanding as we step out to reach souls. In the battle for their hearts, we hope to win as many as we can, but numbers might be less important than we think. Jesus wants committed lives. We overlook how He compelled the hesitant to commit their lives but cautioned those eager to join Him.

What happens to the man who doesn't consider the cost? He gives up his efforts, turning to whatever is immediately more gratifying. What about the one who wants this world and the next, unwilling to make Jesus the Lord of his life?

Our Savior deemed it important to warn those who consider a shallow or double-minded commitment to Him. The Lord requires the clear and unequivocal decision: complete devotion; nothing less than total commitment is approved in His kingdom:

I will call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: (Deuteronomy 30:19)

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There must be no backing out, no longing for the past, no regrets, and no complaints. The reward for those who persevere is eternal life. If we stumble, we rise again, moving forward to higher ground; in patience, we persevere toward holiness.

How can we comprehend His great mercies, wonderful love, and effectual grace toward us unless we first appreciate the depth of our deliverance from the mortal nature with its willful and selfish desires? Now the Savior has set us free from our sinful ways, and at last, we have the liberty to choose life or death. If we're wise, we'll choose life, thirsting for His goodness and surrendering to His Spirit—rising out of death into His holiness!

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.
(Galatians 6:7-8 NKJV)

When we received Jesus as our personal Savior, we should have understood that He is not here to cater to us, but we must serve Him as Lord. Through His great labor of love, He gave us the right to the inheritance of life. When we live by faith, the gift is ours with all of its wonderful amenities: peace, joy, goodness, forgiveness, and the love of God, to mention a few.

Now that we've received Him, what is required of us but to live by faith in Him? He hasn't left us powerless to obey Him; therefore we're without excuse if we are slothful or disinterested, following this world, returning to our former condition. Surely we care about godliness—that's why we turned from sin!

⁷ Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. ⁸ For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8)

The devil changes the meanings of scriptures, weaving his paths through them. He always has. Each time I hear a new definition, I think of Eden. Now tell me, does *righteousness* really mean, "in right standing with God?" ... Did God say... ?

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What Christ has done for the believer is powerful and practical. If we do righteous works, we are righteous; if we practice sin, we are hypocrites. But someone changed the true definitions. The errors seem rational to our minds because we're using human reasoning, unlike the ways and thoughts of God. By rationalizing what God is like, men have formed His identity with their imaginations for millennia. Image-making comes from the imagination and is a form of idol worship.

Those who practice righteousness, producing good works by faith, are in right standing with God. To remain in right relationship, we must walk circumspectly and wisely. We have been warned of wolves in sheep's clothing. If we follow wolves, we will theorize our faith away. Although theories are never proven, changed lives are the real evidence of saving faith. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)* And what is faith without works? Dead.

The Holy Spirit is the surety, or down payment, guaranteeing our inheritance; however, if we despise that endowment, we will lose what we think we have. If we sin without repentance, our hearts will harden, blind us, and rob us of what would rightfully have been ours. We might glibly say, "We're in right standing," while practicing sin, but that is not the Word that sets us free to seek His kingdom and His righteousness.

He has given us all power to overcome and gain the goal of holiness, so those who seek Him are reckoned holy because they finish the course. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, knowing He reserves our riches in heaven, we'll endure to the end on earth. Through His cleansing blood and by His powerful Spirit, God raised us up in Him. He will never leave us whom He *foreknew*, and we are willing to put up a good fight against the darkness!

¹¹ *It is a faithful saying:* For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*:¹² If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us:¹³ If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13) [See page 188.]

As His life increases in us, we grow stronger. If we suffer in life's fires, they refine us. Not many self-competent, independent people, not many rich or wise are chosen by God, but those who

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know the depth of their needs are those who most deeply receive Him.

⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11 NIV)

[Note Paul's obvious fear of God that draws him into purity.]

We will never love the fear of God until we realize it's an ally, not an enemy. If sin catches us in its deadly trap, His fear will free us before sin consumes us:

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

When evangelists imply salvation is free and without cost, they circumvent the words of the Messiah. The Sinner's Prayer is of value to those who fear God and repent, having considered the cost and the commitment. Jude described those who profess Jesus Christ but living in sin, they deny Him by rejecting His righteousness; their commitment was shallow. They didn't count the cost, yet they're *among us*, convincing us of casual sin.

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4 NIV)

The great exchange of His life for ours provides us the redemption of our bodies and the salvation of our souls. When we consider the alternative, eternal life is worth whatever the cost, no matter the pain or sorrow; we're not afraid to fear God:

²⁵ Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me, and

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does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.²⁷ Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.²⁸ For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'³¹ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?³² Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.³³ So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

³⁴ "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned?³⁵ It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(Luke 14:25-35 NASB)

The *possessions* Jesus referred to in the passage above include those whom we hold dear; that is the context. Which will our hearts own—the Savior, or others before Him? If our decision alienates us from Jesus, we're not following Him. The life He calls us to live is courageous and bold as we participate with God for His glory. Can our Father complete and perfect His work in us? According to our faith, it will be accomplished:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you.⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6 NIV)

Understanding the cost and the prize, do we really want to know Jesus? Though it costs our lives and our comforts, do we deeply desire His likeness? Faithfulness is the evidence of our

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commitment; however, if we stumble, as all do, we repent, confess our sins, and find our forgiveness and cleansing in the water of His Word. There is no other oblation; only His Word. He faithfully lifts us up as we forsake our former nature for His.

One day we realize we are involved with the work of our Father, God Himself! As the years pass, we begin walking in synchronous step with Him.

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

Through Faith Alone?

He saves us through our faith by His grace alone: He never had to be born of a woman, resist our temptations, take up the cross, shed His blood, suffer and die for us—but He did. He didn't have to promise us that if we would only live by faith in Him, He would save us, body, soul, and spirit—but He did. He didn't have to send His Holy Spirit to empower us to obey Him, but He did. By His grace, He did everything, and He has given us all we need for life and godliness. By His grace, giving us His gift of faith, His Spirit lives in us and through us to save us.

What's the nature of true faith? Living by faith is the series of progressive steps into holiness—the Spirit's ripened fruit, increasing in us as we believe and grow. We share the life of the Father in Jesus, gaining spiritual gifts by faith. The God of Israel is the miracle-working God. Like His Word, our faith must be living and active, the substance [lit. "reality"] of righteousness hoped for, the evidence of the unseen Holy Spirit within us.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NKJV)

Paul struggled with the flesh nature, describing his inability to win over it; we often end the story there. But he concluded,

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²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

8 *There is* therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

(Romans 7:24-8:1 NKJV) [We must live by our faith.]

³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4 NASB)

¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14 NASB)

¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(Galatians 5:19-21 NASB)

Paul made it clear by using Esau as an example: the one who loves this world without repentance will be disinherited, even though he could have owned much more than the world could afford. Most Israelites missed the promised land, disqualified because their disobedience revealed their unbelief:

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

(Hebrews 3:18-19 NKJV)

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In the previous passage, Israel's disobedience was equated with unbelief because, if we believe something, we will act like we believe it—that's how faith works. If we don't believe something, we won't behave as though we do believe it. That would be irrational, which is why faith without works is, in reality, unbelief. Inactive faith is as dead as unbelief. It's illogical to think we can separate faith from works: if faith is alive, it works. (Read Jas 2)

Our Justification

Justification occurs as a vicarious act of faith. *Justified* actually means, "proven to be righteous." By His resurrection, Yeshua proved His blood worked for us; if it had not washed our sins away, He could not have risen, because He took our sins on Himself when He died. By Messiah's resurrection, the Father vicariously raised us from death to life. Interestingly, He gives His Spirit to those who obey Him; if His Spirit lives in us, then we truly *live* by faith.

¹⁶ This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all ¹⁷ in God's sight. As it is written: **I have made you the father of many nations.** He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. ¹⁸ He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became **the father of many nations**, according to what had been spoken: **So will your descendants be.** ¹⁹ He considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also considered the deadness of Sarah's womb, without weakening in the faith. ²⁰ He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² Therefore, **it was credited to him for righteousness.** ²³ Now **it was credited to him** was not written for Abraham alone, ²⁴ but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:16-25 HCSB)

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When we believe the Spirit raised Messiah from death, we believe in Him who now raises us out of deeds that lead to death. He imputes righteousness to us if we live by what we believe because we believe that He—the living Christ—will deliver us from sin. He alone has the power, so we pray! Again and again, the Scriptures state that if we go on sinning, we will die, but by His power to work in us, we will live, saved by grace through our living faith.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)

3 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:1-2 NASB)

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

(Matthew 4:17 NASB) [After Herod imprisoned John]

Faith Made Complete

¹⁹ Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ... ²⁵ It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’

²⁶ For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:19, 25-26 NASB; cf. Gen 22:18) – Peter's second sermon

While he affirmed we're not justified by the works of the law, Paul made it clear: God manifests His Spirit in all who believe, living each day by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. By foreknowledge, God credited Abram's faith as righteousness, but until he obeyed, Abram's faith was not yet completed; he hadn't fulfilled the imputation, counting him righteous. If he had later

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refused to obey, Abraham's faith would have been dead. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* (Jas. 2:24) James/Jacob continues to address the brothers:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4 NKJV)

He was not writing to the world but to the church. We know that adultery is just cause for divorce. Did Paul contradict James or Peter? When we act on our faith in Jesus Christ, His Spirit reveals His righteousness in us, imparting His life to us. Paul explained how the gift of grace comes to us for our redemption:

6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ...

... ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Romans 6:1-7, 22 NKJV)

Why would we neglect the Gift God has offered us? John wrote down the *Revelation* that God gave to His Son as Yeshua declared to the churches in Asia: "I know your works ...". His introductory words to each of the seven churches couldn't be plainer. How does He know us all? By our *works*. True faith is the substance and reality of our hope. Good deeds are produced by activating our faith. Jesus lives in us by His Spirit when His works in us prove our faith is real. The unveiling of the Holy

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Spirit occurs when we act on our faith, believing Jesus Christ freed us from our sins. While our own efforts can't save us, His Holy Spirit produces the fruit of good works in us as we abide in His Word; His Spirit is our life:

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. (Romans 8:11-14 NIV)

If we believe Jesus washed away our sins, and His Spirit is in us, why do we also believe He can't break our sinful habits? What unbelief!

Faith, or Fear?

A common false assumption is that if we have faith in God, we do not fear Him; furthermore it's been taught that if we fear God, then we lack faith. Men who reason with worldly wisdom are in disagreement with the wisdom of God. When we think like that, we incorrectly divide the Word and improperly address the subjects of fear and faith. If we lean on human reasoning, we will speak rashly. The danger of making hasty statements about the fear of God is lacking such fear: *and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.* (See Jn. 3:18)

The fear of God prepares us for His holiness; but if we are unafraid of Him who has the power of life and death, and He delivers a stern warning to us all, we might neglect to pay strict attention to His words, because we are in *unbelief*. A strong sense of fear should take hold of us, alerting us to dangers that lie in wait for a sleeping church. God will judge pastors and teachers who neglect to warn believers that He sounds an alarm. In fact, He issues warnings to believers that are ignored by the fearless church.

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Let's not be fools, but wise. Yes, it feels more comfortable to avoid it, but the fear of God causes us to shun evil. If we reject the proverb, presumptuously, we risk our souls. Many believers are like dumb sheep: gentle but oblivious. The devil lacks those attributes. He is a smooth operator, a sly strategist who coaxes us to receive deadly lies that warm our hearts and please our minds.

³ But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; ⁴ neither filthiness, not foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not be partakers with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴ Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. (Ephesians 5:3-17 NKJV)

Jesus said the way is hard and the road is narrow. The Shepherd of the sheep leads His sheep. The effective work of His Spirit is the *evidence* that God imputes, or credits, righteousness

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to us. The fruit of His Spirit is the righteousness of God in us. We grow to bear His likeness, but before He appears in us, God *reckons* His righteousness to us; then faith activates its reality as His Spirit reciprocates: as we begin to act, He finishes the action.

His Imputation

When faith is at work, the imputation of His righteousness becomes substantive in us, fulfilled by our living faith: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* (Heb. 11:1) Our faith is completed by its works. God had imputed righteousness to Abraham who later passed the test of faith by obedience: *Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness ... you see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* (Jas. 2:23, 24)

It's a great relief to discover the transformation that occurs when we receive the Savior's atonement for our sins. By faith, we *take in* His death and resurrection. Vicariously, He paid our penalty, and we vicariously died with Him. However, the gospel doesn't stop there, because the proof of our faith is the way we *act* on it by walking with Him.

Apart from *living* faith, we don't have life at all. We might say we believe, but if we remain in disobedience, then we haven't changed from what we were before we believed. In that case, we're worse off than sinners who never believed at all—at least they're not hypocrites. We must not despise our birthright!

¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:16-17 NKJV)

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Romans 6:22 NKJV)

Faith alone is dead, just as the body is dead without the spirit. (Jas. 2:26) Living by faith *guarantees* our entrance into the kingdom of God. Sanctification leads to holiness and is essential

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for life, securing our eternal destiny. We shouldn't be fooled by those who insist we're saved by grace through faith alone, and works are unnecessary for our salvation. It's not entirely true :

³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-11 NKJV)

12 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

In a complete act of self sacrifice, the believer consecrates his body, surrendering himself to the perfect will of God. By one decisive act, we release control of our lives with a solemn vow, believing He will take over within us and begin the work that He will complete—the good, and perfect will of God.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members

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of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:25-32 NIV)

Throughout the new covenant writings, the apostles taught the differences between the acts of the sinful nature that lead to death and those of the Spirit that lead to everlasting life. This teaching is also consistent with the Tenakh [Hebrew Scriptures] in which God reveals His grace to all who turn from sin to righteousness. From *Genesis* through *Revelation*, the Scriptures assure us that while the righteous inherit everlasting life, the disobedient receive the due penalty for their unrighteousness, everlasting punishment. If things were otherwise, God would not be righteous. He is just, however, and no one may mock His grace. He has made the way for us to be righteous in the sight of men and angels. The command is, “*Be holy ...*” (1 Pet. 1:16)

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6 NIV)

Don't be fooled. The church is in a state of lukewarm apostasy, and, to a significant extent, church-goers are in danger, lacking knowledge. The church itself is a mission field; many souls are being lost among us, simply because they have been depending on the words of pastors who are leading the sheep astray, misinterpreting the Scriptures by using human rationale, insensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Protestant Teachings

⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁴⁸ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁴⁹ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁵¹ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
(Matthew 13:47-50)

A great net was cast into the sea to catch all kinds as the gospel of the kingdom was sent forth into the world. Multitudes came into its nets, which will be gathered, the good into vessels, on the day of judgment. The angels will cut off the wicked from the just among us. In our willingness to obey, our faith in His love sanctifies us with victory over sin. By a new birth, we have the right to become children of God. (See Jn. 3:16) Let's cherish it.

⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.
(Romans 2:7-11 NKJV) [Compare the text to these statements.]

We know we belong to Jesus since we crucify the passions and desires of our carnal nature. The evidence of His Holy Spirit at work in us proves we abide in Him. Others will know us by the fruit we bear, but complacency is a sly fox.

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:21-23 NASB)

An Incomplete Gospel

Redemption is the regaining of a possession in exchange for its payment, whereas *propitiation* is the winning of favor by fully satisfying the requirements. Jesus redeemed us: God the Father regained what He had lost in Eden when Yeshua paid the price for our spirit, body, and soul.

²⁰ Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ...

... ³ And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:3-5)

He's watching us. His Spirit knows if we have a fruitful relationship with Him. The benefits of His promises belong to those who walk in His Spirit. This is why obedience leads to life, while sin leads to death: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* (Rom.8:14) All theories dim in contrast to our journey with God. If we continue in Him and pursue righteousness, humility, and love; like Paul, we might also apprehend Christ's likeness:

⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:9-12 NASB)