

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 13

Are All Sins Equal?

¹⁶ If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that.¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

(1 John 5:16-17 NIV)

I have heard it said that a fib is the same as adultery in the sight of God, but that's a perilous error. I heard a pastor say a sip of wine was like murder, but his reasoning was unsound. If the church makes illogical judgments, how can we expect more from the courts of an unrighteous nation? God grant us discernment!

It's true that one act of disobedience caused death in man by unbelief in Eden, but the idea that all sins are equal is erroneous and unscriptural. This is an example of the injustice of men who obscure the most serious "*sin that leads to death.*" (See 1 Jn. 5:16)

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.

(Ephesians 5:5 NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV)

3 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unfaithful, unholy,³ unloving, unforgiving, slan-

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derers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!
(2 Timothy 3:1-5 NKJV)

The Scriptures list deadly sins and teach us justice by the jurisprudence of God, by which He dealt with Israel: The one who broke the law received just punishment, depending on the degree of his transgression. For instance, thieves were required to restore four to five times what they'd stolen, but murderers and kidnappers were executed. Look into it. The righteous judgments of God are throughout the Word, showing us that sin and its punishment vary by the degree of the offense.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

¹⁵ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.
(1 John 3:14-15)

When people reject the one true God, He gives them up to a reprobate mind, as He did with Sodom. Though they should have realized their depravity, in their rebellion, they were blinded and lost, without wisdom or understanding, and encouraged others to fall into decadence that robbed them of all human dignity, and eventually, life itself. Jacob's brother wrote:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 7)

Men of God wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our instruction. The prophets taught us wisdom and discretion as well as truth. If we receive the light, we shun evil and grow into the likeness of Messiah; but if we rationalize excuses for our sins, we will fall into the depravity of the world by turning from the light to the dark. Some say God did not destroy Sodom for its homosexuality but for its violence; yet the Scriptures declare the consequences of rejecting the knowledge

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of God. When men turn their hearts away from God, and when they continually reject His righteousness, He delivers them up to a reprobate mind until His judgments destroy them.

¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, ¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. ²¹ For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. (Romans 1:18-23 HCSB)

About Judgment

Judgment comes first to the church, then to the world. It comes to the church because God holds everyone to account for the things done in the body, whether good or evil, and He is not a respecter of persons in these matters. Just as sin begins on an individual level, judgment moves from individuals to churches to cities and finally to nations.

²⁴ Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶ This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions. For even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ The males in the same way also left natural sexual relations with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error. (Romans 1:24-27 HCSB)

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The wise speak the truth in love, hoping to draw men to repentance and avert the judgments of God.

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

**And if a righteous person is saved
with difficulty,
what will become of
the ungodly and the sinner?**

(1 Peter 4:17-18 HCSB; cf. Proverbs 11:31)

When David sinned by adultery and murder, he tried to cover his sins, but God exposed them. The prophet Nathan judged David correctly, and the king cried out in repentance with fear and fasting. It cost him and his kingdom dearly, but God spared David's life because he repented and trusted in the God of forgiveness and grace. Though the law provided no appropriate sacrifice for his sins; still David believed in the tender mercies of our loving God.

Degrees of Sin

Be sure of this: every sin is a transgression, but not all sins are equal in degree. The next passages are evidence of this fact:

²⁰ Do not join those who drink too much wine
or gorge themselves on meat,

²¹ for drunkards and gluttons become poor,
and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

(Proverbs 23:20-21 NIV)

Gluttony and drunkenness are linked together in the Proverb above since the nature of those sins is similar. Both damage the body and are addictive, holding us captive. Both are incontinent and idolatrous. In Paul's statement below, gluttony is named immediately before sexual sin; these are all similar. In sexual sin, a man commits acts against his own body.

We must all face the Lord in the day of judgment, but today we can be washed. *Now is the accepted time* to receive forgiveness. (from 2 Cor 6:2) The Lord is merciful if we will repent and believe His warnings that would free us. *And ye shall know the*

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truth, and the truth shall make you free.... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (Jn. 8:32, 36)

¹² All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. ¹³ Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "*the two*," He says, "*shall become one flesh*." ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-18 NKJV)

God is good; therefore He commands us to love Him above all. If we exalt anything else in our hearts, it is our idol. As a husband is jealous for first place in his wife's heart, God, who alone is good, is jealous for first place in ours. We can't be good as He is good unless His presence fills us; therefore let's keep Jesus Christ preeminent in our hearts. These words were given for our salvation, that by obedience, we grow up in love.

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. ⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. ⁸ So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thess. 4:3-8 NASB)

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After many warnings against uncleanness and ungodliness and with exhortations for us to live holy lives, we are without excuse if we ignore them. We say we believe, but do our words and deeds contradict our confession? Jesus loves us and wants to free us from habits that plague us if we will just believe.

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 workmanship, seated in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV) [*seated*, as we rest in His Spirit]

²² Abstain from all appearance of evil.

²³ And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.
(1 Thessalonians 5:22-24)

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you for to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Even at church dinners and Bible studies, there are lustful looks because we have not yet rectified our behavior through faith in the cross where Messiah destroyed the strength of the carnal nature forever. Suppressed lust in the carnal heart is adultery; its confession to God sets a man free of it. If we don't destroy our lusts, they will certainly destroy us.

Though God is longsuffering, He is not mocked, but arrogant men deny the power of God. We might parrot what we have been taught, but unbelief rejects the truth. We must not slander His work nor sin against the Holy Spirit. The eternal sin is never forgiven. We must not go near it with our words; if we think we are close to the Lord, let's beware: the lion snatches the proud.

³¹ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

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³² And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

³³ Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. (Matthew 12:31-33)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father in Jesus, and He is the Spirit of the Son in everyone born of His Word. The Initiator of life holds all things together, coming from the Most High God (whom no one can see) to transform hearts that welcome Him. He reveals the heart and soul of God to us who seek Him. As YHWH of Israel, He is the Rock from which living water flows in the wilderness of our need. By His presence, He strengthens or comforts us in weakness or sorrow because God loves us.

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. ² However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds from the field? ⁴ Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God!" ⁵ When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard. (Acts 5:1-3, 4c-5 HCSB)

Why did the people fear? Was it their unbelief or faith that spurred their fear? They believed; therefore they did not lightly esteem God but feared His judgment. Was Ananias or Sapphira forgiven? They had both sinned against the Holy Spirit. What does the Word tell us? Fear God and keep His commandments by faith in His words.

Forgiveness

Some of us have had painful memories since childhood. If we consider ourselves and the grace given us by the cross Jesus died on, then we can extend the same compassion toward our

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own offenders. Although bitter roots might be deep, God is deeper still; He is able to free us from resentment and heal our injured hearts.

When we pray for our enemies and are kind to those who oppose us, we prove we are children of God. When we implore the Lord to forgive those who've injured us, His forgiveness springs up from His Spirit in our own hearts, and He forgives our sins as well as our offenders. Forgiveness toward others is a virtue that sets us free and unlocks windows of blessings to us. Bitterness is not permissible; its sentiment reveals unforgiveness.

It is a terrifying thing to fall from practicing righteousness, grace, and forgiveness toward others, but we must not accept or permit the practice of sin within the church. Even so, we must forgive from our hearts anyone who has personally offended us; after considering ourselves, forgiveness should come easily. *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* (Jas. 3:2 NIV)

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:9-15)
[Unforgiveness is an ongoing sin that can lead to death.]

We're in a war against sins that destroy men's souls; we're not at war against the souls of men. There's a distinct difference. We who profess the name of Christ must turn from hatred or face the wrath of God ourselves. But we must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother and practices sin; then we'd affirm his sin by our association, encouraging him to continue as though his practice is forgiven apart from repentance.

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It's not a mistake to discriminate between right and wrong, nor is there anything wrong with identifying sin; but many of us have trusted in Jesus' mercies and then criticize others who've not known His love or mercy, but the next few verses admonish us to be kind to sinners:

3 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.³ For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior *toward* man appeared,⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior;⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-7 NKJV)

Righteous Discernment

God has given mature believers the task of making righteous judgments within the church for the cleansing, nurturing, correction, and edification of its members. Ignoring immorality among us, we're partners with those who practice it.

Though churches split over these things, Paul preferred to face the conflict rather than turn away from the problem of sinners in the church. He knew hypocrisy spreads throughout the dough like leaven, making whole congregations unclean by the casual acceptance of sin.

Knowing gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual immorality are deadly sins, Paul reproved the Corinthian church for not disciplining a member who practiced sexual immorality. He knew the acceptance of sexual sin would defile the entire congregation. He didn't hate the person at fault but rebuked the leaders for not correcting the brother. They were proud of themselves for showing tolerance toward an ongoing offense, but they should have been ashamed for receiving a brother who was living in sin, allowing into the church an act that leads to spiritual death:

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³ For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:3-5) [Paul suggested this to save his soul.]

It might seem prudish in these times when tolerance is the popular thing, but discernment is vitally important to believers—it might be a matter of life or death. Righteous judgment serves the church in love, keeping us from temptations and deadly sins. Paul told the Corinthian church to agree with him in prayer to hand the man over to the tormenters (devils!) until his buffeted soul came to repentance. The agreement worked.

In his next letter to the Corinthians, Paul was pleased to learn that the [unnamed] man had repented. He exhorted the church to receive their brother back into fellowship. The righteous judgment ended with grace, following repentance: in mercy and love, they comforted their brother by welcoming him back as if he had never sinned. Again we read:

¹⁹ Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

²⁰ Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

In the above passage, the apostle referred to one of the brothers as a sinner because he was *practicing* sin. A false teaching in the church would say he was never a believer, yet we agree that believers do sin. James writes, the one who convinces him to repent saves him from death and covers a multitude of sins. The church must welcome him back in the fear of God who extends mercy to us who repent to pattern our lives after Christ.

There's nothing new under the sun (See Eccl. 9:1). Many want to be rich; the temptation to fall into that snare began with Lucifer. Since the advent of the communications media, men

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have grown rich by convincing audiences that if they want prosperity, they should invest in what often amount to scams.

Prosperity

The “think and grow rich” philosophy has made some millionaires of thieves who deceived the naive. The same mentality has entered the church.

When men say we don't need to wait for the riches of the kingdom, I'm reminded of the prodigal son who wanted his inheritance before its due time. This teaching is a stumbling block to believers and gives the church a bad reputation, but the true church is holy, godly, and content.

If we turned to Jesus because we thought He died on a cross to make life easy for us, then we misunderstood His message. Those on the outside don't realize that sincere followers of Christ seek His kingdom and righteousness more than anything else. We know God will supply our needs when we seek His kingdom and righteousness, not because we want to be rich, but because He is true to His Word:

¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ...

²⁵ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ...

³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:19-21, 25, 32-33)

While predators fill their own pockets with the money of the poor, teachers majoring on prosperity stir our hearts and minds

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to seek wealth, whether they intend to lead us into sin or to bless us. But Yeshua did not die on the cross for us to seek material things; on the contrary, He told us to follow Him, giving up our possessions from our hearts, taking up our crosses, and living lives of sacrifice in service to Him.

⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time— (1 Timothy 6:8-15a NIV)

Even so, the desire to gain wealth is ungodly, worldly, and carnal; it's associated with materialism, covetousness, greed, and envy. *The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith ... (1 Tim. 6:10).* Rich or poor, there is nothing to worry about when we cast our cares on Jesus, knowing He'll take care of us.

When we speak and act in faith, we store up an eternal inheritance without remorse. We often quote, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* (Php. 4:13) Let's read the words in context:

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in

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prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.

(Philippians 4:10-14 NASB)

As a faithful husband desires his wife, God is jealous for us to be His first and not given to adulterous desires and lusts. Do our lives belong to Him, or do other things steal our hearts from God? When He is first, He orders all other relationships.

¹⁴ And the LORD said to Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

¹⁵ For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. (Genesis 13:14-15)

When Abram met Melchizedek in the valley of Shaveh, the priest of God Most High blessed him and told him the Creator of Heaven and Earth had given him victory over Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and the three kings allied with him, champions in war. Abram then gave Melchizedek one tenth of the spoils from his amazing conquest. After Abram honored Melchizedek, the LORD reinforced His blessing and multiplied His promise because he had blessed God with ten percent of his goods: God had already promised the land as an eternal inheritance to his seed. When Abram gave a tithe to the priest, God increased the promises beyond his dreams: his seed would be as innumerable as the stars; his land, from the Nile to the Euphrates! (See Gen. 15)

Abram had set an example before Moses gave the Law and long before Malachi mentioned tithing:

¹⁰ Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.

¹¹ I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit," says the LORD of Hosts.¹² "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be

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a delightful land,” says the LORD of Hosts.
(Malachi 3:10-12 HCSB)

God promises us all-sufficiency when we contribute ten percent of our income to the declaration of His Word. He sees the intentions of our hearts as we rejoice in expressing our love for the Word with the seed that supports those who propagate it.

Unlike a hounding obligation, our mission is to lift the hand of the oppressor, spread the news of salvation, and give to the poor, whom God does not oppress. Paul tells us we should not give from our need but joyfully as we are able, and the Lord who knows all things will respond to us accordingly.

Gladly giving to those in need, the Corinthian congregation earned a good reputation and glorified God by their generosity and godliness. The Lord responded to their faith, giving them all sufficiency in everything—even in good deeds:

⁶ Remember this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

He scattered;

He gave to the poor;

His righteousness endures forever.

Cf. Dt.15:7,

Ex 25:2

¹⁰ Now the One who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God. ¹³ They will glorify God for your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with others through the proof provided by this service. ¹⁴ And they will have deep affection for you in their prayers on your behalf, and by their prayer for you, who long for you

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because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

(2 Corinthians 9:6-15 HCSB)

The evidence of their selfless love brought glory to God and to the message of the gospel, the indescribable gift of everlasting life to all with faith in Jesus. Have we been giving effectively, or investing in a message contrary to the true gospel?

The True Gospel

The gospel does not focus on worldly belongings. To the contrary, it is the message of the cross. Yeshua died for us and called us to take up our cross by denying the carnal nature of the flesh and walking after His Spirit. The Lord draws us into His holiness, but envy has entered the church while Christians might not be aware of the commandment: we must not covet. Along with lust for material things, lust for position, prestige, and title has entered the churches.

⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ in 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; (Ephesians 5:5-7 NASB)

The apostle isn't addressing pagans but the church. If we wrestle with the Scriptures, we must let the Scriptures win our hearts to believe God for the sake of eternal life. Paul warns us not to fellowship with disobedient sons:

⁹ I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. ¹² For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you

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judge those who are inside? ¹³ But God judges outsiders. **Put away the evil person from among yourselves.** (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 HCSB; ref: Deuteronomy 17:7)

The following passage addresses the church, not unbelievers. Judge for yourself; when the Word sternly warns us, should we not fear God? Have we become so foolish in our comfort zones or in our false teachings that we have forgotten the authority and power of God?

¹⁴ “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
The Amen, the faithful and true Witness,
the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

¹⁵ ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”
(Revelation 3:14-22 NASB) [Christ judges the churches by their actions, not by their profession of faith alone.]

Where Are We?

His Spirit powerfully works within us *to will and to do of His good pleasure.* (See Phil. 2:13) As we approach His holiness, we will discover both predestination and our willing hearts will have transformed and conformed us to His likeness.

Are All Sins Equal?

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. ²⁹ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. ³¹ What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (Romans 8:28-31)

Being one in the same Spirit, we are as one man, made as never before—one as Jesus is in God. Someday we will look at one another and exclaim, “We are one because He is in us, and we are in Him!” Since our old man died, we must not return to its putrid death in sin but be made holy by His Spirit, persevering to walk with Yeshua ... *the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.* (Rom. 6:22b)

In this marriage of our lives, our Husband is preeminent; He lives through us, and we are united by His Spirit as we live by faith in Him and in the inspired Word of God. Those who take in His Word gain His mind to know Him. *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.* (John 14:23a NIV)

Now all believers are *fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.* (Eph. 2:19b) *We are fellowheirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:* (See Eph. 3:6) This is true of all who live by faith in Jesus our Savior. We are neither set apart by regulations nor living apart from the moral laws of God, but together we are one body, united by Messiah, the King of the Jews.

Deceptions often depend on human reason; they never look to godly wisdom. Deceivers make the things of the world seem more appealing than an abundant and righteous life.

The Renewed Jew

Jewish believers must recognize the changes that came with the new covenant, or they might find themselves snared by the old way of living, perhaps even by habits—the former fruitless things, e.g., observing regulations and ordinances, now insult the grace of God, making it ineffective through works that appear

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righteous but that cannot save us. The requirements of the hand-written laws God gave as ordinances were fulfilled, finished, and destroyed in His Son's flesh on the cross. We have life in Christ only as we honor His work on our behalf.

¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law-breaker. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. (Galatians 2:18-19 NIV) –on hypocrisy

Abraham is the father of many nations by his covenant from God, but that covenant was not fulfilled until the new covenant appeared to supersede the Mosaic covenant. Not an addend to the Law, this covenant, as promised, refreshes us with new life:

¹⁶ “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷ Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16-17 NIV) –Yeshua

The professing believer who loves the things of this world, unless he repents, will perish with all his stuff just like others perish. The Jew's attachment to previous ordinances and works is a stumbling block to his righteousness in Messiah:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Philippians 3:3)