

Peter, Do You Love ME?

John 21

Isn't it interesting, that in spite of all the religions preaching love and peace, there's so much hate and strife. Was it always this way?

In the beginning, all was good. Genesis 1: 31 - And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

And at the end, all will be well. Revelation 21: 1 to 7 - 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. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Will it always be this way? Matthew 24: 4 to 14 - And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

So it's only in between those two events that there is any problem. When sin entered the human race, many problems emerged. And the close relationship man had with God was broken. But God didn't give up on mankind. He sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself.

2 Corinthians 5: 17 to 19 - Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. & all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, & hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

And Our Lord Jesus experienced this separation from Our Heavenly Father, while bearing the weight of our sins on Calvary's cross.

Mark 15: 34 - And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Being separated from the ones we love can be a traumatic experience.

Whether it's a small child suddenly realizing that their parents are not around; or the first time a child is going away to school all by themselves; or when in hard times all the money and possessions are gone; or when two people deeply in love are separated for any length of time; the anticipation of re-union and restoration only grows with the passing of time. People of the world don't have much to go on.

Thankfully we, as born-again believers, have Our Lord Jesus Christ to help us through those trying times. Hebrews 13: 5 - Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

To-day, people arrogantly separate themselves from God, and turn away from Him, in spite of God's commands. Acts 17: 30, 31 - & the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

In case someone here doesn't know.

Romans 14: 11 & 12 - For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Where is your name written? Revelation 20: 11 to 15 - And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 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.

If you are not sure of your position with God, don't leave here to-day, before you have clarified it.

John 3: 15 to 18 - That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

After the resurrection, Christ Jesus only appeared to believers.

And after the final judgement, only believers will live with God in heaven.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is still calling. Matthew 11: 28 to 30 - Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The devil will use anyone or anything to keep people away.

2 Corinthians 4: 3 & 4 - But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 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.

Let's look at the account of blind Bartimaeus.

Mark 10: 46 to 52 - And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

Luke 18:35 to 43 has the same account. Who was obstructing him? And what did Our Lord Jesus Christ do? We ask Our Lord Jesus to have those "Blind Bartimaeuses" brought to Him immediately, and by those who were blocking them.

& those trying to worship God at the Temple in Jerusalem, but were impeded by other religious activities. John 2:13-17 - & the Jews' passover was at hand, & Jesus went up to Jerusalem, & found in the temple those

that sold oxen & sheep & doves, & the changers of money sitting: & when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, & the sheep, & the oxen; & poured out the changers' money, & overthrew the tables; & said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. That's twice Our Lord Jesus cleaned the Temple. Would He not do the same in most churches to-day, if He dropped by.

But those are external factors. It's all too easy to blame someone else for our problems. But at some point in our lives, we must stop blaming others, and accept the fact, that we are the problem.

1 Timothy 1: 15 - This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

It is not an easy process. David fought it as long as he could, but when he refused to deal with his sin, God sent Nathan to confront him.

2 Samuel 12: 7 & 8 - And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

Did David deny it like Cain in **Genesis 4: 9** - & the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? & he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

2 Samuel 12:13 - & David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. & Nathan said to David, The LORD also put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

And we can see the sincerity of David's repentance.

Psalms 51: 1 to 19 - To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me

with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

We need this attitude as well. 1 John 1: 8 to 10 - If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

And thankfully we have forgiveness and cleansing in the Blood of Our Lord Jesus. 1 John 1: 7 - 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.

Then there's Peter & John 21. How did this begin? In John 6, Our Lord Jesus challenged the 12 disciples after some hard teachings.

John 6: 66 to 69 - From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Peter affirmed his loyalty then. Later, at the Last Supper, he re-affirmed it. Matthew 26: 33 to 35 - Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

Maybe he didn't realize the gravity of the situation, so Our Lord revealed more to him. Luke 22: 31 to 33 - And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

Peter obviously loved Our Lord, but he hadn't really been tested, as they were always protected by Our Lord. Are there any examples of people being tested in the Bible? Job 1: 6 to 22 - Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also

among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Matthew 4: 1 - Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Luke 4: 13 - And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

If the devil was always watching Our Lord to trip Him up, what do you think that he's got on us? So how much do we love God? How much do we love Our Lord Jesus? John 14: 15 to 24 - If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot

receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

Does Our Lord Jesus still expect us to obey His commands?

Matthew 28: 16 to 20 - Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

What are God's main commands? Matthew 22: 34 to 40 - But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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.

These are not new ones, but they are straight out of the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 6: 4 & 5 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Leviticus 19: 18 - Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

There's continuity between the Old and New Testaments.

But as they were under the law then, they tried to win God's favour by good works. The Pentateuch expanded on those two principles, but after 2000 years no-one had been successful.

Romans 3: 23 - For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Romans 6: 23 - For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Was mankind doomed? Would God give up on us? He could have done it many times, but He didn't. And then He sent His Redeemer.

John 3: 16 & 17 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Now the purpose of the law was to lead us to Christ. Galatians 3: 23 to 25 - But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

How did Christ re-iterate the law; do this and you die? No! Our Lord's teachings, found in the Beatitudes challenge us. Matthew 5: 3 - 12 - Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

And when we get into trouble, we can call on Our Lord Jesus, just like Peter. Matthew 14: 30 & 31 - But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

But even though Peter and the disciples were with Our Lord Jesus for three years, when confronted with extreme fears and certain death, abandoned Our Lord. Mark 14: 50 - And they all forsook him, and fled.

Did Our Lord abandon them? No! He received them back into fellowship. He revealed Himself to them after the resurrection. John 20: 19 - Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

Later He commissioned them to go forth into the sinful world, proclaiming the Good News. Mark 16: 14 to 18 - Afterward he appeared unto the eleven

as they sat at meat, & upbraided them with their unbelief & hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, & preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; & if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, & they shall recover. The Good News is that the Lord Jesus Christ who helped them, is still alive and is still able to help us to-day.

Hebrews 13: 8 - Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

How can we know that God will give us another chance?

Our Lord Jesus gave Peter another opportunity, to re-confirm his loyalty and love. John 21: 15 to 19 - 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. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

How did it start? Luke 22: 31 to 34 - And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

When believers were arrested later & appeared before the Romans, they were given three chances to save themselves. All they had to do was to deny Christ, & accept Caesar as their god. So Peter has 3 times to re-affirm his loyalty to Christ. And by the last question, we can hear the anguish in his voice. John 21: 17 - He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

People might say, why was Christ so hard on Peter? All the other disciples deserted Christ, but there's no record of them being reprimanded. However Thomas was addressed for his unbelief. John 20: 27 - Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

Peter, as a leader, was held to a higher standard, just like Moses.

Deuteronomy 3: 25 to 27 - I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

Now did Our Lord hold it over Peter, making him do penance. No! Thankfully God doesn't hold it over us. 1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

After each of Peter's statements, Our Lord re-commissioned him,"Feed my sheep". As any parent or leader knows; there's a lot in that saying. That's why Biblical standards for pastors are so high.

1 Timothy 3: 1 to 7 - This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

It takes a lot to successfully lead a group of people. Most of the work is done behind the scenes, in prayer and preparation.

We are praying that God will do for to-day's pastors, as He did for Saul.

1 Samuel 10: 26 - And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.

Now that Peter was re-established, how did he prove his love to Our Lord Jesus? He followed Our Lord's directive, "Come, and follow Me" in John 21.

The other disciples did so also. John 10: 27 & 28 - My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Did you hear that? Eternal or everlasting life for the believers of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are guaranteed by God's seal.

Ephesians 4: 30 - And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are

sealed unto the day of redemption.

So Our Lord wants us to follow Him; what are some obstacles to beware of? Matthew 16: 24 - 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.

The process of self-denial is long and hard. Just as we think we've done it all, Our Lord reveals something else that we need to resolve. This is a life-long event, requiring daily course corrections.

Romans 12: 1 to 3 - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Now if we only did self-denial, that's not enough. People of the world do that. What's dieting, but denying themselves of food? Will that make them more Christ-like? I haven't seen any. We need to do what Our Lord Jesus did, and take up our cross. I've seen people walking around the world dragging a cross, and I've seen people nailed to crosses. But I don't believe that Our Lord wants us to do that. It's too easy, and it's usually only religious spirits manifesting.

Remember the golfer, Payne Stewart, who died in a plane malfunction.

He was always challenging people to compare their actions with what Our Lord Jesus did. How often do we do that?

In this world where absolutes are suppressed daily, it's getting harder to stay on the highway of holiness. Christians are backsliding so fast, that Our Lord sums it up in Matthew 7: 21 to 23 - 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.

Remember Our Lord's admonition to the churches in the last days.

Revelation 2: 4 & 5 - Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, & repent, and do the first works; or I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

If we really lived like Christ, we wouldn't have many friends, because most rejected Him. Our Lord speculated on how much faith He would find when He returns. Luke 18: 8 - I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

But to-day, most are pre-occupied with fellowship.

What have believers done in persecutions and inquisitions?

Hebrews 11: 36 to 38 - And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Also it seems that there is a major attack of lust and sensuality on the Church, trying to get us to compromise our principles. It caused a lot of trouble to God's leaders; Samson with Delilah, Judges 13 to 16;

David with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11;

Solomon and his 1000 supporting actresses, 1 Kings 11: 1 to 13 -

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

That's what Balaam advised Balak to do, Revelation 2: 14 - But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of

Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Does the Bible say anything about personal relationships?

1 Corinthians 7 says a lot about marriage, and verse 39 sums it up. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

With all that's going on in the world, we need to be on our guard. We need to take those unclean thoughts captive to Our Lord Jesus.

2 Corinthians 10: 1 to 6 - Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

We need to break off the curses of lust etc. regularly. We need to stay away from ungodly things, places and people. We usually don't have much choice about those we work with. As ambassadors for Christ, we have to be honest, competent, and hard-working; and ready for opportunities to minister to the others. Of course, we should be binding and loosing over the workplace. & when work is done, we can minister to our families and other believers.

1 Corinthians 16: 15 & 16 - I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, & to every one that helpeth with us, & laboureth.

I used to watch the James Bond movies; but no-one got saved in them, and no-one got saved by watching them. As they do not emulate godliness, I have let them go.

Now when Peter was restored, he went charging out for Our Lord. The Acts of the Apostles is full of examples of what he and Paul did. Was Peter's faith ever tested again? Many times. But a defining moment was in Acts , where he and John were threatened and beaten.

Acts 5: 26 to 42 - Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter

and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

How did others respond? Luke has the account of the rich young ruler.

Luke 18: 18 to 27 - And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

He wanted to follow Our Lord, but there was an idol in his heart, that he wasn't willing to deal with.

Ezekiel 14: 1 to 8 - Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Sports and money are two of the biggest idols that need to be dealt with.

Now money is not the root of all evil. 1 Timothy 6: 10 - For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

There are a lot of people out there, who will willingly take as much of your money as they can. Some even claim to be christians. Beware of them, and stay away. 2 Peter 2: 1 to 3 - But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

So, after Our Lord challenged him, the young ruler let his love of money turn him away from Our Lord. Some people turn away for much less. Where have all the deliverance people gone?

Now we can all pick out the splinters in others' eyes; but what about the beams in our own. We live in a world that is ruled by consumerism. The drive to get us to buy more bombards us constantly by the media.

We need to daily break off the garbage, we've picked up. 2 Peter 2: 4 to 7 - For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, & delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And

spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; & turning the cities of Sodom & Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; & delivered just Lot, vexed with filthy conversation of the wicked: We have a daily challenge.

Romans 12: 21 - Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Remember subliminal advertising. It's still around, but a lot more subtle. The devil is trying hard to get us hooked with ungodly soul ties. That gives him an open door to get demons in us. There are also a lot of occult objects out there, that we need to stay away from. Kurt Koch wrote many books on the occult, and how much trouble it caused believers who engaged in it.

Even though we've been through a major economic downturn, and people don't have as many possessions as before; are the idols still in the heart?

Because, if they are, and we refuse to deal with them; it is only a matter of time before the same thing happens, as to the rich young ruler. "Word Faith" is responsible for a lot of this; as they openly encourage greed and the love of money. By mis-interpreting Luke 8, they try to get your money by promising that God will pay back many times over. This is a fraudulent claim, as most of their people don't get anything. By the way, Luke 8:11 says that the seed is the Word of God; NOT YOUR MONEY. And compare their leaders, with their lavish life-styles, to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 9: 58 - And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Jude has some sober advice for us.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. 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. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise

dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory & majesty, dominion & power, both now & ever. Amen.

But we need to follow Jude 3 and earnestly contend for the faith.

Then we can follow Our Lord Jesus Christ's commission, which includes Mark 16: 17 & 18. "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Thus, we will be able to show our love to Our Lord Jesus.

Pastor T. John Franklin

Church of Salvation, Healing, and Deliverance

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