

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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RUNNING THE RACE

Part 1

The Challenge

By Rayola Kelley

Recently, I wrote an article about Islam. From all appearances Muslims are coming to a town near us regardless of protests and concerns. There are a few ways we can look at what may be confronting us. We can become irate because it appears to be another culture that refuses to assimilate into the American way. As in the past, this refusal could end up undermining the very freedom of this country, eventually bringing everyone under some type of financial bondage and tyranny. Even though some of these people are fleeing from oppressive countries, whether it's corrupt governments, extreme poverty, or religious persecution to find a place where they can excel, they fail to realize that the very thing that they are holding onto is the very thing that oppressed them in the first place. They can appreciate the benefits this country allots them without realizing that they are holding to, and supporting the oppressive attitudes, ways, and practices that first took them and their families captive, causing them to flee their former life.

The second conclusion we can make is to fear Muslims and isolate ourselves from them in suspicion and paranoia, hoping that they are not "radical" and will stay in their little worlds, while letting us happily stay in ours. The problem is Americans have "stuck their heads in the sand" far too long, not just about this matter but about corruption in our own government, electing politicians who have no calling or vision for America, the dulling down and indoctrination of our children, and most of all the institutionalized Church becoming culturally minded, worldly in



its practices, and taking on its own form of political correctness, covering up the true light and losing its savor to stand distinct and clear in the world.

The third thing we as Christians can do is see the Muslims as a mission field, a field that is white unto harvest (*John 4:34-35*). Instead of seeing them as indifferent monsters and enemies, we can see them as souls that Jesus died for. In fact, according to the June issue of *Prophetic Observer*, a revival is taking place among the Muslims. Every day, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity, ever year, six million Muslims convert to Christianity in Africa alone. We must note that these conversions are not happening because the Church is on fire, and is being evangelistic in carrying out its commission (*Mark 16:15*). In many cases it is happening because Jesus is stepping into the midst of their culture and is revealing Himself to them. Their stories of conversion reveal how faithful and committed He is to saving their souls (2 *Peter 3:9*).

I was challenged by a recent publication to purchase a book, *When the Mosque Comes to Town*, to educate myself about the Muslim people. I must say it is a valuable tool and I encourage other believers to arm themselves with understanding in order to avail themselves to properly serve as a witness to these souls.

The author of this book, Gina Wilson, maintains that westerners have become conformed to the cultural way of thinking about religion. It is all right to quietly speak about it in small groups, especially in public, in order to ensure no one becomes too uncomfortable with what they believe.

At this time I cannot help but be honest about this very subject. In my experience, it seems Christians rarely speak about Jesus even during times of church fellowship. I can count on one hand the number of times I have tried to fellowship on Christ at a

church potluck or gathering, and I am the one who initiated the conversation. However, I must honestly ask myself at this point, and perhaps you need to ask yourself, about who will be the most uncomfortable, the person or persons who might overhear me speak of my faith, or would I be the most uncomfortable about possibly rocking the boat after being subtly dulled down by the philosophy of my pagan culture. Who am I really protecting?

Ms. Wilson made this valuable comparison in her book, "Muslims do not shy away from religious differences, nor do they shy away from religious discussion. To Muslims, God is a way of life: a way of speaking, eating, breathing, working, playing and thinking. God is to be brought into every conversation, thought, and action... Here is where we western Christians need to learn something. God should be **our** way of life, too! Jesus Christ should be in every thought, breath, and action of our own...Live, breathe, and act Jesus Christ." (pg. 17)

Ms. Wilson went on in her book to give this admonition, "Let me give you a GREAT BIG WARNING. If you do NOT share anything about your identity in Christ at the first available opportunity, your (Muslim) neighbor will think you don't worship God at all. God is the first thing on their tongues. So He should be on ours." (pg. 18)

It is clear from reading the book that if we Christians treat Christianity as simply another subculture in a multi-cultural society, the Muslims will not only be confused by our silence on such an important matter, but they will see us as hypocrites. It will seem that we tacked Jesus on to our activities because He is not really in our hearts, on our lips, nor the inspiration behind our life.

If Jesus is not real to us, how can we expect a Muslim to even consider Him as being important and significant, let alone take us seriously about

His salvation? If Jesus is not worth declaring, then how can we expect a Muslim to receive Him as Savior? If Jesus is not worth living for, how can we expect a Muslim to embrace Him as Savior and Lord, knowing it might cost them their very life?

Sadly, there is a name for the type of gospel that is being displayed by the visible church. It is a gospel that fits into the category of "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). It is known as Moralism. Larry Spargimino describes this gospel in June's *Prophetic Observer* as a method of self-improvement. He goes on to say, "Moralism is one of the most seductive false gospels in the world, though we often say little, if anything, about it and find some other departure from Scripture to be more damaging and consequently more demanding of a learned dissertation attacking the problem. This false gospel can show itself in any number of political and cultural movements. Nevertheless, the basic impulse of moralism comes down to this: the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements on behavior."

Spargimino then addresses the heart of the problem with this false gospel, "For the moralist in the Western church, the cross provides us with the ability to live a blessed and happy life. The closest we get to the cross is a decorative ornament" He then quotes a man by the name of Richardson, "If the church is to fulfill its last days mandate it must reclaim the theology of the cross as it was proclaimed by Jesus, the early apostles and the early church."

As I watch the various aspects of Christianity being redefined and swallowed up by heretical nonsense, it is clear that the visible church in America has been systematically taken captive by the times we live in. It is also obvious that the Church age is winding down as times become precarious, not only in America but throughout the whole world (2 Timothy 3:1).

As I consider the days in which I now live, I have to ponder my Christian walk. The Bible clearly speaks of the Christian journey involving a walk and a race. When we are first born again, we rest in the glorious light of the Father's love, but as we start to

crawl towards His promises, we learn to stand by faith on them. As we hold onto the promises, we begin to walk by faith towards the one and only God who never changes. Once we learn to be steadfast in our commitment towards the Lord, we can begin to run the race towards a particular finish line.

It is clear that there are various stages of growth in the Christian life. This proves that a Christian is either going forward in his or her Christian life or he or she is going backward. To go backwards, points to a state of backsliding into the same old life, ruts, and mindset. In fact, backsliding can cause a person to slide into a spiritual, mental, and emotional state that can prove to be seven times worse as it brings leanness to the spirit and despair to the soul. Because of previous knowledge and experiences with God such individuals can be plagued by shame, guilt, despair, and condemnation. People in this morbid state can even become sentimental about their past experiences with God, while bemoaning their present miserable state.

I must point out at this time that the condition that is the most dangerous to Christians is not when they are backsliding and aware of their plight, because it is clear that God is still working on them. Rather, the most dangerous state is the one where Christians are dulled down or asleep as to their spiritual condition (*Ephesians 5:14-17*). They are living on the plateaus of mediocrity, while consoling themselves that they are not as bad as the world, even though they find themselves frustrated that their religion seems dead and ineffective as they desperately cling to the fact that they still love Jesus (*Revelation 3:14-19*). They may go to church, pay tithes, be outspoken about their beliefs, and present an impressionable religious front, but behind the performance is half-heartedness that lacks vision, passion, and conviction. Such a person may be indifferent to lost souls, barely tolerant of the brethren, and resentful of any intrusion or inconvenience that religion may cause him or her along the way.

Clearly, such individuals are not walking the walk, and if they are not

walking out their Christian life, how can they be part of the race the Bible outlines in some of the Apostle Paul's writings? How can they be heading towards the finish line if they are not pressing forward with everything in them (*Philippians 3:11-14*)?

This year millions of people will watch as athletes from all over the world take center stage at the Olympics. Orchestrated pomp and circumstance will signal its start. Each athlete will give their best and their all to win coveted medals. Winners will cause the flags of their nations to fly higher than normal, and many enthusiastic spectators will cheer for their teams in solidarity as patriotism is taken beyond its usual mundane level, for at least two weeks.

As Christians, can we learn something about the Christian race by considering the Olympics? We know that the Olympics originated in Greece when the Grecian Empire was still supreme. In the beginning only freeborn Greek men were allowed to participate and leaf wreaths or crowns were given to the winner. It was a way for the Grecians to honor their gods, especially Zeus and to spread the Hellenic culture throughout the Mediterranean. These games continued even when the Grecian Empire came under Roman rule, becoming a political tool. A truce between warring kingdoms was even called during the time of the games.

As Christians, what can we learn from the previous information? The first thing we must get in our minds is that the Christian race is not about us. Many times Christians do not run the race because they cannot see how it will personally benefit them up front. They excuse their lack of participation by convincing themselves that there are others more qualified to run the race. They are content to stand in the background.

The truth is every Christian is called to participate in the race. We are representatives of an unseen kingdom, redeemed, reconciled to God, and set free by the sacrifice of our Lord and King. We are called to run this race in the name of our King, our God (*Colossians 3:17*). Our loyalty to the kingdom of heaven should create fervent passion to do our best and our love for our king should inspire honor-

able dedication to do all we can to not only finish the race but do it with honor.

Clearly this Christian race is taking place in the arena of the world. It is all about bringing attention to our heavenly citizenship. The pomp and circumstances for each of us started when the angels of heaven rejoiced that Jesus found us, lost sheep wandering in the great wilderness of the world (*Luke 15:4-6*). We had a torch (the Gospel) placed in our hands to carry on our journey through the world. We were supplied with the necessary water (Holy Spirit) and food (the Word of God) to effectively run and gain the crown at the finish line (*Matthew 4:4; Mark 16:15; John 7:37-39*). The Apostle Paul actually identified the crown awaiting believers in *2 Timothy 2:8* as the crown of righteousness.

The question is how many of us, who call ourselves Christians, are really running the race? Keep in mind, there are three types of people who are part of the Olympics. There are the *spectators*. They are not there to participate, but to watch, support, and enjoy the games. They want to be part of the excitement without having to go through the preparation. They want to watch others win for the team, and share in the victory, but they will never know the real taste of personal victory. They are there to support and cheer on the competitors as they proudly wave their country's flag, while becoming lost among the masses.

The second group is the officials who *oversee* the activities surrounding the games. It takes a great effort to ensure everything runs smoothly at such events. Clearly, someone has to do the job. There are many Christians who oversee and try to make sure everything runs efficiently in local churches and religious activities. However, overseeing such activities does not mean the person is actually running his or her particular race.

God has a whole heavenly host to ensure everything runs properly when it comes to the race of life. Granted, there are those who are in different positions in the kingdom of God to ensure there is order in the church, but their responsibility is not to make sure that everyone is running

the race according to God's plan for them; rather, these people's positions entrust them with the responsibility to equip the saints so that they will run the race (*Ephesians 4:11-16*).

The final group in the Olympics is made up of the *participants*. They are there to compete for the prize, not to entertain the world. They know their abilities and talents will be tested and tried, and their hope is that they will exceed their own personal expectations, and their aspiration is that they will win the ultimate prize in the end, bringing glory to the flag they are representing.

The final group makes up the smallest group when it comes to the spectators and the officials. For Christianity the final group should comprise the biggest group, but I fear the visible church mimics the world when it comes to the percentage of people who are actually running in the race. It is clear that there are many who prefer to be spectators when it comes to the Christian race, and there are those who want to oversee and control the race for others.

In this series my goal is to challenge believers to consider where they are when it comes to the Christian race. It is also my desire to explain what it means to run the race. Sadly, some have laid the torch down to take a few worldly detours, while others have dropped the torch altogether to go their own way and do their own thing, while tacking on aspects of religion. As a result, the organized church, for the most part, has forgotten why it is here. It is not to make Christianity look like a successful lifestyle or a popular subculture; rather, it is about making the Christian walk count and the race successful. It is about gaining the ultimate prize that will count in the world to come and shine throughout eternity.

The remaining question is, "If you are not presently running the race, will you accept my challenge to discover what it means to put on the right shoes in preparation to run it until you cross the finish line" (*Ephesians 6:15*)? †



THE END OF THE STORY

By Joel Joseph
(The Prophetic Scroll)

Roots are important: The roots of Christian Zionism come from the early, mostly Jewish church with its Hebraic character. The roots of Anti-Semitism come from Satan, the Catholic church, the early church fathers and most of the reformers. Examine your roots and cut off and cut down the roots of error.

The Jews are indestructible. They can never assimilate into the nations of the world, but they can and will assimilate into their own Hebrew-rooted religion, for want of a term.

The end of the story shows God's work with the Jews coming to a successful conclusion as the spiritual life of God enters and works in and through them to complete what He originally called them to.

The end of the story shows the ultimate success of God's work and choice and the ultimate failure of the work of the flesh in and through all who oppose Him. The end of the story for the Jews is their recognition and acceptance of their Jewish Messiah, Yeshua.

The end of the story shows some Arabs getting saved, but the majority clinging to the religion of works, law and the flesh – Islam and being destroyed by God.

The future will speak and reveal the truth as it only can. But when the future reveals the truth, what will your position be? Will you stand securely in confidence with our Lord and His truth? Will you stand in eternal regret before Satan with all his masses? Will you stand with the hell-bound mass-media of the world?

Genesis 17:18-21 "Abraham said to God, 'O that Ishmael might live before you'. Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call him Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I have blessed him and will multiply him exceedingly...But My covenant I will establish with Isaac.'"

(www.thepropheticscroll.org)

A PERFECT HEART IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD

Part 1

By Jeannette Haley

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” – Proverbs 4:23

God asked Satan if he had considered his servant Job, and I am asking you the same question. *“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 [despises] evil” Job 1:8?* [Additions mine.] To me, God’s description of Job is the definition of a perfect heart—a heart that remained perfect in spite of an imperfect world, and in spite of Satan’s attacks on him; in spite of suffering great losses of his family, income, and health. His so-called “friends” merely added to his horrific suffering. What was his secret? Job maintained an upright heart before God in a well-established faith, in his understanding of who God is. He had obviously “set his affections on things above” because he had a worldview of eternity, eternal life, and his Redeemer standing on the earth in the latter days.

God is still looking at hearts. Therefore, what we need to honestly ask ourselves is what does God see when He searches our hearts? What are our innermost, secret thoughts? What is our emphasis, and what do we pursue? What are we conformed to? *Romans 12:2* says, *“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.* As believers, we must always be mindful of *Colossians 2, 3*, *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”*

Consider our Great Example, Jesus. How did He, as man, maintain a pure heart? After all, He did ordinary things in this world like we all do—He learned a trade, He attended a wedding, He ate with common folks and

sinners, and walked among the people. His chosen disciples came from differing backgrounds including fishermen, a tax collector, and one was of noble birth (Bartholomew Nathanael). *Hebrews 5:8* tells us, *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”* Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and He never faltered from His mission on this earth. Let us follow His example while we journey through this temporal world with full assurance that we are merely passing through. If you need a “spiritual tune up” read and meditate on *Philippians*, especially chapters 2 and 3. We are commanded in 2:5 to *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* The entire book of *Philippians* explains how that is to be accomplished.

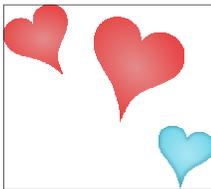
We know that God also said of King David that he was a man after God’s own heart. We also know that King David sinned against the Lord, but he always confessed his sin, and forsook it. There is no mistaking the intensity of his prayers as recorded in Scripture. *Psalms 51* is a beautiful example of his passion for a pure heart as he cried out to the Lord, *“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom... 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”* verses 6, 10-12. When was the last time you prayed such a prayer with your whole heart?

The Bible is clear that *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it”* *Jeremiah 17:9?* If the conscience hasn’t been seared because of departing from the faith by giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (*1 Timothy 4:1, 2*), then every man, woman and child knows, that deep down in their heart, (the innermost being, will, understanding, thoughts and motivations) they are self-centered and fall far short of the glory of God. We know that we cannot make ourselves perfect, or up-

right, no matter how hard we may try. Our very best and highest thoughts, imaginations, inclinations, and intentions fall far short of the glory of God. So, how can a person hope to have a perfect heart in the sight of the Lord?

Someone might say, “I know! I have an answer to that question. His name is Jesus Christ, and once a person “accepts” Him, then their heart is changed, and He gives them a new heart. After all, *Ezekiel 36:26* promises *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”* And this He does as we love, trust and obey Him. Unfortunately, there are some among the untaught concerning the whole council of God who believe that God is like Tinkerbell, coming down with a magic wand, and “poof”—just like that—a person is suddenly changed, forever. Yet, as time rolls on, all too often there is no evidence of a new life coming forth that bears godly fruit.

Does this mean that God’s Word has somehow failed, so we must bear the burden of putting on a front and appearing like a “new man in Christ?” A thousand times no! God never fails, and His Word never fails. It is people who fail when they pick and choose out of the Bible what they want to believe while ignoring God’s conditions, commandments and criteria. People are forever looking for some sort of “magical solution” or “silver bullet” to make them “super spiritual,” and it just doesn’t work that way. You see, what many Christians fail to understand is that, to put it simply, God does His part, and we, as people with a free will, must choose to do our part. In other words, we need to beware of trying to do what only God can do, while expecting Him to do what we are commanded to do. We must remember that we are in a covenant relationship with God, and we are the ones who are told to *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”* *Proverbs 4:23*. *Ezekiel 18:31a* clearly states our responsibility, *“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit.”* Turning from our sins is our part if we are truly repentant. *Isaiah 55:7* points out how we must cooperate



with the Lord, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon." In *Ephesians 4:22* we are told that we must "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."

If we let *Hebrews 12:1* sink into our hearts, it should bring us to our knees. It reads, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Note that it is up to us to lay aside every weight and sin. What about the lust problem humanity is plagued with? How do we confront adultery, fornication and pornography, all of which must not be "once named among" us? ("But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." *Ephesians 5:3-6*.)

According to statistics listed on the Transparent Ministries Web Site, 60% of all Christian men and 30% of all Christian women are addicted to pornography. 60% of the women who answered the survey admitted to having significant struggles with lust; 40% admitted to being involved in sexual sin in the past year; and 20% of the church-going female participants struggle with looking at pornography on an ongoing basis. This ought not to be! Jesus is returning for a church that is "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing....holy and without blemish" *Ephesians 5:27*. In *2 Timothy 2:21, 22* we learn, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, (iniquities, or moral deviations) he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto

every good work. Flee also youthful lust: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." [Additions mine.] Fleeing youthful lust (which doesn't just happen to the "youth") is a commandment that we are to obey. Maybe Lot could "linger" in Sodom, but he had two angels in his house that took him by the hand and led him out. We have the Word of God available to us that we need to be quick to obey, and not wait for an angel from heaven to drag us out of temptation.

Of course sin falls into many different categories that can be defined, divided, and subdivided, and so forth, but the bottom line is that anything that offends God is sin for He is HOLY! Therefore, let us "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" *James 4:8-10*. All of God's warnings to us of the "signs of the times" are upon us and escalating by the day as well as unabated inordinate (perverted) affections and the lusts of the flesh; however, the difference is that pornography is as addictive, if not even more so, than drugs.

Concerning such, our hearts should be deeply moved as we read Peter's plea to believers, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul". Peter is reminding us that we are only passing through this world, and that it is our duty as believers to abstain from the lusts of the flesh, whatever they may be, that war against the soul. It is impossible to please God while loving the world, satisfying the lusts of the flesh, and giving way to the devil at the same time. How many professing Christians are merely playing church and "sort of" trying to please God with divided hearts? And, how many are so doubleminded that their hearts have grown cold towards the Lord? Our hearts must be transformed by faith, the Word, and prayer. The truth is, many people, instead of being truly transformed, are only

outwardly reformed, or merely conforming, or simply performing to give the outward appearance of a changed heart. In the end, their fruit tells on them.

The decision to pick up our cross (death to the self-life) and follow Christ must be a heart decision, not just a mental or emotional one. It is the "fixed" heart that will endure to the end. In *Psalms 57:7* David wrote "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" which he repeated in *Psalms 108:1*. Then in *Psalms 112:7, 8*, in describing a good man said, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid". "Good" means upright, and it is the upright heart that is perfect to God. A person with a perfect heart will ascend unto the hill of the LORD, and stand in His holy place. (*Psalms 24:3*.) Such a person has "clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" *verse 4*.

Clearly, as Christians of the New Covenant, we have responsibilities before God just as people of faith had responsibilities before God under the Old Covenant. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law, the types, shadows and hundreds of prophecies, but that does not mean that as New Testament believers we are excluded from obedience to God's Word; and, that includes diligence where our heart is concerned. In other words, it is a dangerous folly to assume that once we have become a Christian, we can merrily float down the "religious river" while ignoring, and neglecting our own heart condition before the Lord. "...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" *1 Samuel 16:7b*. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" *Jeremiah 17:10*.

Sadly, the first mention of the thoughts of man's heart is in *Genesis 7:5*, which says, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." We know that in the end days it will be as it was prior to

Noah's flood. Indeed, today we are witnessing another type of flood—a flood of filth described in *Galatians 5:19-21*: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Such “works of the flesh” should never be allowed to gain entrance into the church that Jesus died for. The church is to stand apart, distinct and separated from the world, which is made up of all of these evils. And, since the church is made up of the individual members of Christ's Body, it is vital that each member stand against the works of the flesh, the world and the devil from gaining entrance at any time, on any level. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear” *1 Peter 4:17, 18*?

The question is how can we maintain a perfect heart in an imperfect world? Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” *Matthew 5:8*. Our hearts must be cleansed if they are to be pure. King David prayed “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” *Psalms 139:23, 24*. We must allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and reveal to us what needs to be cleansed. No one, and nothing can cleanse us but the blood of Jesus, but we must first humble ourselves before God and allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of what is displeasing to God in our own hearts, confessing it to Him, and praying with David, “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....” *Psalms 51:1-4a*. Once the Lord has cleansed us, we must be vigilant to ask Him to fill us with His Spirit. (See *Matthew 3:11*; *Luke 11:13*; *24:49*; *John 14:17*; *Acts 2:38*). It is then our responsibility to fill our minds and hearts with His Word. *Titus 3:5* says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The Word “washes” us, and the Holy Spirit renews us.

Then walk in obedience to the Word of God, and keep your heart and mind pure by thinking upon whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (see *Philippians 3:8*). “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” *Galatians 5:24, 25*. And, finally, remember that it is the pure in heart that shall see God.

Will you see Him? †

COMMENTS

“...thank you and Rayola for the June Newsletter. In Rayola's Q&A section, ‘Will My Family Be Saved’ piece, I must say, it really ministered to me. It is on my heart to make copies of the entire newsletter and begin mailing it to my unsaved loved ones.” - WA

“Your messages of late have been very powerful! We are living in exciting and serious times. Thank you for speaking the truth about current events and not worrying about being ‘politically correct!’” - WA

“The Swaggarts have been doing a series on SBN of exposing not only infiltrators in Homeland security, but knowing hired communists and Islamic people. Our Government has been over run with Soros people. Pray like never before and be out spoken. We are at war with Isis and our government is on the wrong side.” - WA

“I'm afraid Trump won't make it and then we will really feel the heat! I pray the Lord have mercy but I'm afraid we have to go down the tubes for our sins and for the NWO to transpire. We will need GRACE to get through all that is coming and keep our eyes fixed on HIM!” - TN

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WILL THE RIGHTEOUS BE PUNISHED WITH THE WICKED IN AMERICA?

Q: (Excerpt from e-mail.) *I used to believe with all my heart that as long as I lived my life to please HIM, I would not be subject to His wrath over the immoral filth that this country is embracing such as abortions and gay marriages. I used to believe that the righteous were set apart from the wicked and I guess in a way, protected. Will the righteous be punished with the wicked? Does the destruction of this nation also mean the destruction of the righteous as causalities of war? I feel lost. I don't know how else to put it and my faith is unsteady. I don't like that feeling and I have a fear that I have never felt before. Can you put any of this in perspective?*

A: It will take a bit to answer your questions to bring a proper perspective. First of all let me assure you that you are not alone in your distress. I had the same intense struggle, but it happened seven years ago. There are many in America who are struggling with what is going on in this nation. You are no doubt like Lot was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was vexed in his spirit over the evilness surrounding him (*2 Peter 2:7-9*). Such wickedness can all seem so hopeless and overwhelming, even for the most committed Christian. I wish I could say that if the right person became president, everything could be reversed. However, there is one problem. The Bible is clear about the environment that will exist in the end days. It states both a warning and a promise in *Matthew 24:12-13*, “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.”

As Christians we need not be shocked at the days we are living in. We were warned that before Jesus comes back, it would be like the days of Noah (*Matthew 24:37-39*). In the days of Noah, people were living their lives as usual, but it tells us that every imagination of the thoughts of the heart were evil continually, the earth was corrupt (leadership) and filled

with violence (no regard for life). Since the people had no fear of God in Noah's days, they were indifferent to the warnings that God's judgment was coming upon the face of the earth. The second epistle of Peter tells us, "*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 (2 Peter 2:5).*"

What you are feeling right now is a natural reaction to the wickedness that has been clearly taking center stage in this country and throughout the world. *Proverbs 14:34* gives us this valuable insight "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*"

I believe that one of the problems we as Christians have in America is what I refer to as the "apple pie in the sky philosophy" that has been embedded into our psyche. For example, "Bad things do not happen to good people." "The men in white hats always win." "If we don't like what is happening in our government, we can change it at the next election cycle." "If the right political party is in control, it will stop our country from running off the moral and financial cliff." "America is a great country, who has experienced God's blessings and will continue to do so in spite of sin because it is still the most giving, compassionate, caring country that offers freedom to the oppressed and asylum to the persecuted." As Americans, we have taken great pride in the patriotic ideas that have been passed down to us, but the assumption that this greatness will always last because we are America is not realistic. It has caused some of us to operate in wishful thinking, and caused us to sit on our laurels, while thinking that our nation will never be brought to the depths of despair and ruin. We pride ourselves that since we remain the most giving, helpful country that surely God will not let us fall.

The problem right now is that our country is quickly being reduced to a mere proverb. We have been watching the dismantling of our country from the top down (wicked leaders), and from the foundation upward (throwing God out of the arena and making morality a mockery). Our Constitution has been shredded by law-

less leaders. It seems that many of our congressmen live in the Washington bubble, losing sight of their real mission. At best, they have fine-tuned their political posturing and their talking points, while they play games with each other to give the impression that they are standing for something, when in fact they stand for nothing while they sell their souls on the various auction blocks erected by special interests groups, betraying the trust of those they are to represent.

The moral fabric that kept this country distinct (God and righteous laws) is being stomped on, often outlawed by treacherous strokes of a pen, mocked by indifference from lawmakers, sacrificed on the altars in the name of rights gone amuck and political tolerance, and disregarded by justice which is bent on pushing perverted agendas on the masses. So what is the real crux of the matter? Have we Americans put too much confidence in a system that is clearly being controlled by the god of this world, Satan? Have we exalted men that are clearly subject to a fallen nature, and have we presumed that there are enough checks and balances to keep the justice system in check when it fails to uphold the law and becomes one who throws righteousness out the door while promoting immorality? Are we upset because our choices for president come down to a business man who presents a confusing message and does not adhere to political posturing and correctness that will sell it, a wicked dynasty that is power-hungry, and a deluded Socialist that has no regard for those aspects that made America great? Are we distressed because we are being forced to accept the horrible reality that our wicked government is not our savior but our enemy, the majority of congress seems to be selling us out for 30 pieces of silver, that our freedom is no longer valued by the upcoming generation that has been dumbed down by communistic, immoral educators, and that justice for the most part has become a mockery? How many of us are waking up to the fact that if we are honest with ourselves, we failed to recognize that this country has been systematically brought to this sad place for at least the last hundred years by both political parties, as God

was being removed out of every arena, while we Americans maintained our "pie in the sky" optimism and waved our flags, talking about greatness and freedom because it has not yet hit our pocketbooks or our 401ks? Yet, a nation without God is a nation that has lost its real substance, luster, and glory and is sliding towards destruction.

The Bible tells us everything that can be shaken will be shaken (*Hebrews 12:26-27*). The fruits we are now seeing in our nation are shaking every "apple pie in the sky" notion we Americans may have been clinging to, causing the faith we have put into our government and its leaders to take a nosedive into the pit of hopelessness. In other words, our point of reliance is failing us; our point of assurance has betrayed us, and the fruits and consequences this country is now experiencing is deferring any hope we had about preserving the American way of life.

As far as what we as Christians are now witnessing and experiencing in our country, we need to understand that our nation is now tasting the consequences of its various abominable sins. It is clear that God is not blessing this nation and as a result, it not only has lost credibility on an international front, but its various national institutions from family, government, education, and the economy are collapsing from within, while being consumed by wickedness.

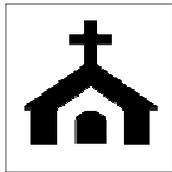
However, God's judgment and wrath are two different things. Judgment means separation and wrath means anger. Each time God shakes this nation in a type of judgment, it is to wake up His people so they will choose the ways of faith towards Him and start preparing themselves to stand in the midst of the storms that are and will bring tribulation with them. This brings me to a very important point. Tribulation is not wrath but anguish, travailing, and sorrow. Jesus stated that we would have much tribulation in this world, but we are not to fear for He has overcome the world (*John 16:33*). *1 John 5:4-5* tells us that if we are born of God we will overcome the world by our faith in the Son of God. *Acts 15:22* states, "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the*

faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

Wrath is also not the same as persecution. Although persecution is beginning where the IRS and Christian businesses are concerned, Christians in America have not yet suffered persecution for their faith as is the cases of many other Christians throughout the world. In the last century more Christians were tortured and killed for their faith than in the first nineteen hundred years of the history of the church, and if Jesus does not come soon, in this present century the numbers of martyrs for their Christian faith will quickly surpass the number of martyrs in the last century.

The church in America has been spared from such persecution, but sadly, American Christians have taken on the attitude that somehow they are exempt, immune from their faith being tested in the fires of tribulation, persecution, and testing. Because of inexperience and certain pet teachings, they have incorrectly labeled God's judgment as wrath and times of testing as punishment.

This brings me to the subject of the church in America. The Lord is coming back for a chaste Church and not one that has been defiled by the world. We have to honestly ask ourselves how much is the church in America responsible for the spiritual environment that now exists in this nation. How much of the world has come in to corrupt the church's attitude, and how much occult, New Age heresy now exists in the church that has perverted the truth. How much has the different watered down, heretical versions of the Bible taken the discerning edge from many Christians as they embrace a feel-good gospel that tickles their ears. Has the church adopted a type of political tolerance,



by downplaying the seriousness of sin and alleviating any preaching about hell? Is the church failing because it is more interested in securing an earthly inheritance, than possessing its spiritual inheritance? Is the church properly preparing Christians to stand in these dark times or has it lulled them to sleep by promising them a

false security? For example, are Christians expecting and watching to escape certain end-day events instead of being faithful to watch for Jesus' blessed return? Is it selling some type of "insurance" that allows Christians to trust in a false immunity so they can keep their present life, or are they being challenged to let go of this present world, and prepare to look up for their redemption is drawing near? The final questions we must ask is why do some of the persecuted churches in other parts of the world fear for the church in America and are praying that persecution will come soon to our shores? Is it because the living church needs to be separated unto Jesus and come back to center of what is true, submit to its excellent calling, be obedient to its real commission (preaching the true Gospel and discipleship), and serve as the reflection of God in this dark age?

God's Word is clear. His people will not be subject to His wrath, but this does not mean we will not taste the bitterness of man's and Satan's wrath (*1 Thessalonians 1:10*). We need to keep in mind that Noah was not delivered from God's wrath; rather, he was delivered through it. Instead of sparing the city of Sodom from His wrath to preserve the righteous, God delivered the righteous Lot and his family out of it before raining fire upon it. Both Daniel and Ezekiel were taken in captivity and spared of the judgment that fell on Jerusalem. God knows how to preserve those who are His, but as believers, that does not mean we will escape persecution, grave trials or even death because of our faith (*2 Peter 2:5-9*). The sun shines on both the evil and good and the rain falls on the just and on the unjust (*Matthew 5:45*). It is for this reason that as believers we do what is right, not as a means to be spared of challenging times, but because we do believe and love God for He is worthy of the best we have to offer.

Finally, this present world is not the believer's home. As Christians, we are citizens of an unseen kingdom; therefore, we are strangers and sojourners simply passing through the darkness of this age. We are ever walking towards our real home, while holding lightly to the things of this

world, and preparing ourselves to enter the door into God's glory. We need to let go of that which represents a false hope and begin to put our real confidence in the only One who can save this world, our nation and our souls, Jesus Christ, the future reigning king and judge. †

BETRAYED BY A KISS?

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Let me be on my guard when the world puts on a loving face, for it will, if possible, betray me as it did my Master, with a kiss. Whenever a man is about to stab religion, he usually professes very great reverence for it. Let me beware of the sleek-faced hypocrisy which is armour-bearer to heresy and infidelity. Knowing the deceivableness of unrighteousness, let me be wise as a serpent to detect and avoid the designs of the enemy. The young man, void of understanding, was led astray by the kiss of the strange woman: may my soul be so graciously instructed all this day, that "the much fair speech" of the world may have no effect upon me. Holy Spirit, let me not, a poor frail son of man, be betrayed with a kiss! But what if I should be guilty of the same accursed sin as Judas, that son of perdition? I have been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus; I am a member of his visible Church; I sit at the communion table: all these are so many kisses of my lips. Am I sincere in them? If not, I am a base traitor. Do I live in the world as carelessly as others do, and yet make a profession of being a follower of Jesus? Then I must expose religion to ridicule, and lead men to speak evil of the holy name by which I am called. Surely if I act thus inconsistently I am a Judas, and it were better for me that I had never been born. Dare I hope that I am clear in this matter? Then, O Lord, keep me so. O Lord, make me sincere and true. Preserve me from every false way. Never let me betray my Saviour. I do love thee, Jesus, and though I often grieve thee, yet I would desire to abide faithful even unto death. O God, forbid that I should be a high-soaring professor, and then fall at last into the lake of fire, because I betrayed my Master with a kiss. †