

# WHAT IS HEAVEN WORTH TO US?

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## INTRODUCTION

God was willing to send His only Son to earth, to live in poverty, suffer persecution and humiliation, and then bear the sins of all mankind for all time in a horrible death on a Roman cross. Jesus was willing to give up His glory with the Father in Heaven, come to earth to be born as a human being, live a life of poverty and deprivation, suffer persecution, and then endure the shameful treatment He received at the hands of the Romans at the instigation of the Jews. We know that Jesus shrank from this ordeal (Mat. 26:36–45; Heb. 7–9) with “strong crying and tears,” and the Father heard Him. But God did not spare Him this painful (physically and spiritually) experience. He **could** not, if we were to be saved. Jesus accepted it meekly: “Thy will be done” (Mat. 26: 39, 42, 44). This was the only way Jesus could be made perfect and become the Savior of all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8–9). What if He had decided it was just too hard? What if He had decided we just weren’t worth it, and He wanted to go back to Heaven? What if standing up for Christ leads **us** before hostile courts and juries? We are to follow Him regardless. For some reason, the Father and the Son do not seem to think they are asking too much of us that we live for them and give up something for them.

**“YE ARE NOT YOUR OWN, YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE”**

(1 Cor. 6:19–10)

Jehovah once tested Abraham’s faith, even though He called Abraham His friend and talked with him personally. He told Abraham to take his only son Isaac, the child of

promise whom he loved, and offer him as a burnt offering. Abraham obeyed without question, through the point of drawing back the knife to kill Isaac, whereupon God stopped him (Gen. 22).

Abraham, from the time Jehovah called him out of Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:27–28; 12:1), had no permanent home. He had the promise, to be sure, but the only piece of land he ever owned was the field encompassing the Cave of Machpelah (23:9) where he buried Sarah. We have already seen how he offered his beloved son Isaac, at the command of the Lord (Heb. 11:17). Abraham's faith was unwavering because "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (v. 10). That would be a worthy motto for us, as well. When we forget where our permanent home is, we become worldly and sensual.

The very first of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exo. 20:2). We don't have to fashion an image of wood, stone, or metal in order to break this commandment. Anything or anybody who is allowed to come before God in our hearts becomes our god. Joshua told the Israelites, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Jos. 24:15). Elijah said to the Israelites on Mount Carmel, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal be God, then follow him" (1 Kin. 18:21). There is no room for fence sitters in God's service. As Christ told the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14–18 (in modern terminology), "either get in or get out."

Jehovah began to speak to Samuel when he was a very young child, and the very first prophecy He revealed to Samuel was against Eli, the High Priest, and his sons. Among other things God said, "For I have told him [Eli] that I will judge his house

forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not” (1 Sam. 3:13). Eli honored his sons above God; therefore, they became his gods. Eli was a good man in many ways, but in this respect he was an idolater. We can be idolaters, as well.

Other Old Testament examples could be given, but the point is clear: God will not share first place in our hearts. “No man can serve two masters; For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). We are the temple of the Holy Ghost; we are not our own, we are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19–20). The Christians in Macedonia first gave themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5), and their possessions just naturally followed.

Jesus went on to tell us that we are “the salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mat. 13–14). If we lose our savor, we are worthless. We are to let that light shine so that the world may see our good works and glorify the Father (v. 16). The gate into Heaven is **strait**—that is, it is narrow and difficult (7:13–14)—and the way is narrow. One of His disciples told Jesus he would follow Him, but first he had to go and bury his father. A simple, reasonable request, it would seem, wouldn’t it? But Jesus said, “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (8:21–22). Family cannot be allowed to come before Christ.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter that they should not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (6:14–17), but they were to come out from among them and be separate. This unequal yoking would include any alliances that would put pressure on us to obey men rather than God (marriage, job, school, friends).

Jesus said the first and greatest commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Mat. 22:37–38).

That doesn’t leave any heart, soul, or mind for anyone else.

Matthew 5:29 reads, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” The right hand is to be cut off if it causes us to offend (v. 30). These statements are not to be taken literally, of course, but they vividly illustrate what we must be willing to give up in order to please God.

Jesus said those who followed Him were more important to Him than His earthly relationship with his mother, his brothers, and his sisters (Mat. 12:47–50). He really put Peter on the spot not long before He ascended back to Heaven by pressing Peter to tell Him how much he loved Him (John 21:15–19). One of these times He asked, “Lovest thou me more than these?” To whom or what “these” refers we will leave for another study. Suffice it to say that Jesus wanted Peter to love Him above and beyond any other person or thing in his life.

There comes a time in a Christian’s life when he should have grown and developed into a mature saint. The Hebrews writer rebukes those who have not grown, but still need milk. We grow by first drinking the milk of the Word, and then graduating to strong meat as we exercise our senses in discerning good and evil (Heb. 5:12–14). We can’t expect to absorb knowledge by osmosis. We must be skillful in the Word of righteousness (v. 13); else we will remain spiritual babies. We have to work at it. If we don’t, we will not be prepared to withstand persecution when it comes. If we crumble at

the disapproval of friends or family, what will we do when **real** threats arise? The recipients of this letter had already undergone severe trials and afflictions (10: 32–34).

In 1 Corinthians 4:6, Paul admonishes us not to think of men above that which is written. The message, not the messenger, is the important thing. This would apply to any other situation where we might put a human being, including family, above God.

Paul wrote to the Colossians that they must continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel (1:23). They were to seek those things which are above, to set their affection on things above (3:2). They were to walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time (4:5). Their speech must be with grace, seasoned with salt, that they might know how they ought to answer every man (4:6). Only a thorough knowledge of God's Word will provide this seasoning and the correct answers.

“And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). We must live every day of our lives with those facts in mind. Does it seem difficult today to take a stand for the Truth? Perhaps it will seem easier when we picture ourselves dying and then standing before God in judgment. Our **death** is real (unless Christ returns first); **Christ's return** is real; the **judgment** is real. Our suffering here on earth will be as nothing in view of those things.

Hebrews 10:26 states that, if we sin willfully, there is no other sacrifice for our sin, but we will find ourselves fearfully awaiting the judgment and the fiery indignation which will devour those who do not obey God. If those who violated Moses' law died without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses, how much worse punishment will we deserve? We will have trampled the Christ under our feet and counted His blood as

worthless. God is love, it is true, but He is also a God of vengeance. When we, after all that the Father and the Son have done for us and for our salvation, show such contempt for Them both, we can look forward with great fear to falling into the hands of an angry God. He will repay us at the judgment according to our deeds.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the “faith” chapter, relates the experiences of that “great cloud of witnesses” (12:1). Without faith we cannot please God. Those who would please Him must not only believe that He is, but that He rewards those who **diligently seek Him**. This is no half-hearted, be-faithful-when-it-doesn’t-require-any-effort-or-sacrifice seeking. These examples of faith under trial are given to us as an encouragement.

God has called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3) and has given us great and precious promises so that we may be partakers of the Divine nature. Having escaped the corruption of the world, we are not to go back into it (v. 4). We **can** lose our calling and election, therefore we are to give diligence to make them sure (v. 10). Since all of us need to be reminded and encouraged constantly, Peter did this (v. 13) so that his readers will be able to remember his words even after his death (v. 15).

Although sometimes it may seem as though God has forgotten us, His promises will never fail. But if the good promises to the faithful will not fail, that also means that the promises to the wicked will not fail, either. Second Peter 3:10 is one more reminder that this world and everything in it will be burned up. All the things we valued so highly will vanish in an instant. Only the eternal will remain. We, like Abraham, look for new heavens and a new earth (12–13), where there will be only righteousness.

John writes in his first epistle that we cannot have fellowship with God unless we walk in the light as Christ is in the light (1:6–7). When (not if) we sin as Christians, we are continually cleansed by Christ’s blood. But those who know Christ will keep His commandments (2:3–5). We will not sin habitually. Those who do not keep His commandments do not know Him—it is that simple. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (v. 15). The world and everything in it will pass away. Only those who do the will of God will abide forever (v. 17).

The little book of Jude tells us to “**contend earnestly** for the faith which was once [for all] delivered to the saints” (v. 3, emph. LJM). *Earnestly* implies that we are to make a diligent effort, which in turn implies that we must be prepared at all times. We are to build ourselves up on our faith and keep ourselves in the love of God (v. 21).

### **“BEHOLD THEIR THREATENINGS”**

(Acts 4:29)

Jesus said, “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven....Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mat. 5:10–12). In talking to His disciples about what lay in store for them, Jesus said, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which, after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him” (Luke 12:4–5).

Later He said something that the world might think strange, coming from the Prince of Peace: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send

peace, but a sword” (Mat. 10:34). His Gospel would set family members against each other. He told the apostles, “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved...For the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant his lord” (vv. 22, 25).

Jesus challenged us in Matthew 10: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven” (vv. 32–33). In this context, Jesus’ statement does not refer just to the confession we make before baptism, but to the confessions we must be willing to make publicly even if it proves very costly.

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat. 10: 37–39). The parallel passage in Luke reads, “If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (14:26). We must count the cost and be willing to forsake everything we have (vv. 28, 31, 33)—even family, if necessary.

John the Baptist was killed because he dared tell Herod it was not lawful for him to have his brother Philip’s wife (Mat. 14:1–12). Why couldn’t he have just kept his mouth shut? He didn’t have to confront Herod that way. He could have ignored what the king was doing—but he didn’t. Jesus told the disciples that the world would hate them, since it hated Him. The time would come when those who killed Christ’s messengers

would think they were doing God a service (John 15:18; 16:2)! This statement is reminiscent of Saul's zeal in persecuting Christians.

The Lord further demanded, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat. 16:24–26). "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (18:29).

Paul discussed marriages in which a Christian is married to an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12-16). He said that, if an unbelieving spouse was pleased to stay with a Christian mate, well and good (vv. 12–13). It might be that the believer could convert the unbeliever (v. 16). But if the unbeliever will not live with the Christian (unless he/she compromises his/her faith to please him/her), then the believer should let the unbelieving spouse depart (1 Cor. 7:15). (Of course the abandoned spouse would not have the right to remarry in such a case where there had been no fornication.) Paul recognized that a spouse could be a temptation to a Christian, who might attempt to please the spouse more than pleasing God (vv. 34–35). The principle that "Evil companionships corrupt good manners" (15:33) might even include a family member who tries to persuade us to disobey God. If we will be steadfast and **unmoveable** and abound in the work of the Lord, we are assured that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (v. 58).

Peter sincerely thought he was strong enough to go with his Master, even unto death. He confidently affirmed, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended....Though I should die with thee, yet will I not forsake thee” (Mat. 26:33). We know the sad story of how Peter hotly denied that he even knew Jesus at all. Now, we ought to be extremely careful not to judge Peter too harshly. We can’t possibly know how we will react under pressure until it comes to us. We should pray for the strength and courage to confess Jesus, under fire, and never, never deny Him, yet never becoming overconfident or even cocky.

The Sanhedrin court in Jerusalem arrested Peter and John and commanded them not to speak any more nor teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). It could not have been easy for Peter to reply, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (vv. 19–20).

As soon as they were released, Peter and John went to their own company and reported all that had been said and done. They did not pray, nor did they ask others to pray that they might be spared persecution. No, they said, “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29). Their prayer was answered shortly thereafter, and this time all of the apostles found themselves before the Jewish court again (5:25–28). In answer to the High Priest’s charge, that they had been commanded not to preach any more, Peter answered, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (v. 29). Later, Herod killed the apostle James (Acts 12:2), and proceeded to take Peter also. But an angel released Peter from prison (vv. 7–10).

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “For do I now persuade men, or God? For if I yet pleased men, then should I not be the servant of Christ” (1:10). And neither can we be servants of Christ if we are more eager to please man—**any** man—than we are to please Christ. We are to “crucify” ourselves so that we no longer live, but Christ lives in us (2:20). Acts 7 is the account of Stephen’s sermon, which culminated in his being stoned to death. He, too, could have simply kept his mouth shut, rather than confronting those angry Jews. Because he defended his Lord, he thereby became the first Christian to pay the ultimate price for his faith.

Chapter 8 opens with Saul, who had consented to Stephen’s death and even held the coats of those who stoned him, making havoc of the church in the great persecution that followed Stephen’s death. Continuing into chapter 9, Saul was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” against the church. Not content with finding Christians in Jerusalem and throwing them (men **and** women) into prison, he procured papers from the High Priest authorizing him to go to Damascus and search for Christians there. And it was on the road to Damascus that the Lord’s appearance forced him to come to grips with the fact that he, by persecuting the church, had been persecuting the Son of God.

A contrite Saul obeyed the Voice and went into Damascus, where he waited, fasted, and prayed until Ananias came and told him what to do to be saved (Acts 22:16). Now the man who had come to Damascus to inflict harm on Christians entered into the synagogue and began preaching Jesus to those Jews, showing powerfully how that Jesus was the very Christ. As you might imagine, this made the Jewish leaders

very angry, and they plotted to kill him. But the disciples let him down in a basket through a window in the wall (see 1 Cor. 11:32–33 and Gal. 1:16–19).

We know that Saul of Tarsus had to give up much in order to become a Christian and preach Christ to the world. But maybe we haven't thought about the fuller descriptions, which are related in bits and pieces throughout the book of Acts and Paul's letters, and put the accounts together. He had to give up his earthly family, apparently, who had sent him to Jerusalem as a boy to be educated. He had to renounce all his Jewish connections, including his teacher and his prominent position as a Pharisee, with such a great potential career in Judaism.

He often had to work with his hands as a tentmaker to provide for his own needs and those that were with him. At Lystra he was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead (Acts 11:19). Other partial descriptions of his sufferings and sacrifices for the cause of Christ may be found in 1 Corinthians 4:9–13 and 11:23–33, 2 Corinthians 4:8–18, and Philippians 3:4–10. He was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), knowing that without it, there could be no salvation for a lost world, to whom he was indebted. He said that he gloried in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience or endurance (5:3). Should not we also look at tribulation and trial in that way?

Paul reckoned that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). From verses 31 through 39 Paul, beginning with the rhetorical question, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” recites a list of forces that cannot separate us from the love of God. In this list he includes being killed for the name of Christ, but then says we are “more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Even if we must die for Christ, we haven't lost—

we live with Him. We must not be weary in well doing if we wish to reap the harvest (Gal. 6:9). Paul admonished the Philippians not to be terrified by their adversaries, because it was given them to suffer on behalf of Christ (Phi. 4:28–29). From a Roman prison he wrote, “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me” (4:13).

Paul points out God’s severe side in Romans 11:22. It isn’t enough to **begin** to serve God; we must **continue** in goodness and not fall. In 2 Corinthians 5:10–11, Paul reminds us that we must stand before God in judgment and that, as the Judge, He will strike terror into the hearts of those who have not obeyed Him. We are to present our bodies a **living** sacrifice, as opposed to the **dead** sacrifices of the law of Moses (Rom. 12:1–2); but even further, we must not allow ourselves to be conformed to the world. What we have presented to God as a sacrifice no longer belongs to us. We are to live peaceably with all men **as much as it lies in us** (v. 18). Sometimes this is not possible, and certainly this command does not apply if we must compromise the Truth in order to get along with others, whoever they might be—including family members.

The Thessalonians received the Word in much affliction (1 The. 1:6). They had been persecuted by their own countrymen, as Paul and the Christians in Judea had suffered at the hands of the Jews (2:14–15). Paul had told them before that they would suffer tribulation (3:4). Nevertheless, they were still to walk honestly toward them that are without (4:12), and to stand fast, holding the traditions Paul had taught them (2 The. 2:15)

Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith so that he could lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). Timothy was not to be ashamed of the prisoner

Paul, but was to be a partaker of his affliction for the Gospel's sake (1:8). "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (v. 12). In Paul's afflictions, in his hour of need, all of those in Asia turned away from him (v. 15).

Paul told Timothy to endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3–4). Most of us in this affluent age and in this wonderful country have been guilty of this entanglement. Paul suffered trouble as if he were an evildoer, even being bound in prison (v. 9). "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (v. 12).

After recounting some of the mistreatment he received at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, Paul says, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (3:12). If we have never suffered persecution, maybe we should search for the reason. Paul charged Timothy to endure affliction (4:5). Paul knew he would not die a natural death, and that his death was very near, but he wrote: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (4:7). The Christian's life was not intended to be all sweetness and light nor a bed of roses—it is a **fight**. Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world (v. 10). At his first appearance before Caesar, no man stood with him, but all forsook him (v. 16). He often stood alone, as we sometimes may have to stand alone.

The first four verses of Hebrews tell us that we must give earnest heed to the things we have heard and never let them slip, because every transgression and

disobedience will receive a just reward. The assemblies of the saints, as well as the Bible classes, are designed to help us do these things.

Jesus was made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10). Since He has suffered, and since He was tempted in the same ways we are tempted, He knows how to sympathize with us (2:18; 3:15). He knows our weaknesses. We must be steadfast until the end, sharing in Christ's sufferings when we are called upon to do so (v. 14).

Read Hebrews 10, concentrating particularly on verses 19 through 33. We must hold fast the profession of faith without wavering, because He that has made us the promises is faithful. While we remain on earth, we are to provoke one another unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. These assemblies serve the purposes of worshiping God and of allowing us to draw on the strength of each other. We are to edify and encourage each other. For both of these reasons, forsaking the assembly is a **sin**, no matter how we may view it. **Forsaking** the assembly is not necessarily the same as simply **missing** the assembly. Sometimes we all have to miss an assembly because of illness or some other unavoidable circumstance. What is condemned is deliberately choosing not to be there when we **could** be there if we wanted to and if we put forth the effort.

Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The finest of Egypt could have been his; but he chose rather to "suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). The account of the calling of Moses by Jehovah to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land of Canaan is a story of incredible frustration, as the people time after time stubbornly refused to put their trust in and be obedient to God. Moses'

patience and forbearance are exemplary, except for that one time. He lost his temper and struck the rock when God had told him to speak to it (Num. 20:7–10). Because of that disobedience, Moses was not allowed to go into Canaan with the Israelites, after all that he had endured at their hands. This incident should serve as a vivid reminder of God's attitude toward rebellion. Any time we deliberately disobey **one** of God's laws, we have rebelled. "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23). Assembling with the saints for worship and Bible study is only the beginning place for a Christian. To disobey that command is to rebel against God.

Some of the unnamed heroes of faith "were tortured, not accepting deliverance"; others were mocked and scourged, imprisoned, some were stoned, some were sawn asunder, or killed with the sword. Others wandered about with only skins for clothing, destitute and afflicted, tormented (Heb. 11:35–37). They, like Abraham, looked for the promise, but did not receive it in their lifetimes. Now, what was our excuse for missing the assembly?

Hebrews 12 begins with an admonition to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" so that we can with endurance run the race that is set before us. What might some of those "weights" be? They could be anything or anyone that keeps us from giving ourselves wholeheartedly to the race for our Eternal Prize, following the example of Jesus, Who endured the cross with its shame and its pain (v. 2). Thinking of the way He endured such cruel treatment should give us courage and keep us from growing faint (v. 3).

We will not escape if we turn away from God when He speaks to us; we must serve Him acceptably (Heb. 12:18–28), “For our God is a consuming fire” (v. 29). He just will not accept anything less than our best! We should say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (13:6). We must bear the reproach of Jesus (v. 12–13). Like Abraham, we must remember that this world is not our home; we have no permanent dwelling on earth, but we look for an eternal city (v. 14).

James tells us that the trying of our faith works patience (endurance) (1:3). Certainly all of those mentioned in Hebrews 11 had their faith tried! Why would we expect ours not to be tried? The Lord has promised the crown of life to those who endure trial and temptation and who love Him (v. 12). We are to be **doers** of the Word, and not just **hearers** (v. 22). It does us no good whatever to listen to sermons and Bible classes week after week after week if we lack the courage and the discipline to put into practice what we have heard and read. We can obey all of God’s laws except one, and still be lost (v. 10).

Professed faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:14–26). We cannot be friends with the world without being enemies of God, and vice versa (4:4). We are to submit ourselves to God and resist the devil (v. 7); when we do resist him, he will run from us. The prophets are our example in suffering, affliction, and patience (5:10). God will reward those who endure and are faithful **to the end**, not just part of the way.

Peter’s epistles exhort us to be patient in hope, even though we must endure severe trials and temptations (1 Pet. 1: 3–7), never taking our eyes off our inheritance which will never fade away. We are to desire the “milk of the Word,” so that we can grow (2:2), but we are not to remain milk-fed babies always. We are to **grow**. Again

there is the theme of persecution: “For what glory is it if ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (2:20).

Women are to be in subjection to their own husbands so that, even if they will not listen to the Word of God, when they see the behavior of their wives, they may be won over (1 Pet. 3:1–6). (Wives who compromise to please their husbands will never win them.) If we suffer for righteousness’ sake, we are happy, and should not be afraid (v. 14). When men speak evil of us, as though we were doing wrong, we must suffer for doing good rather than for doing evil (vv. 16–17). As in all of these inspired writings, Christ is our primary example of patience in suffering unjustly (v. 18). We should not think it strange that we may be facing a fiery trial, but we should view it as our sharing in Christ’s sufferings (vv. 12–13). It is a privilege to be reproached for the name of Christ (v. 14). “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf” (4:16).

Judgment will begin first at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17), and if this is true, what shall the end be of them that do not obey the Gospel of Christ? (v. 17). When we suffer, we must commit the keeping of our souls to our faithful Creator (v. 19). We must cast all our care upon Him (5:7) and be sober and vigilant, because the devil goes about as a roaring lion, with the intention of devouring us (v. 8). He knows our weak spots and is skillful at exploiting them. The afflictions that beset us are the same as those plaguing our brethren all over the world (v. 9). We are not alone. Suffering will make us perfect (mature, complete), if we are faithful and refuse to compromise (v. 10).

As has been stated repeatedly throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Truth will be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:2). God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation (v. 9). The vivid descriptions in verses 10 through 19 could almost have been written today!

The world does not know us, because it did not know the Christ (1 John 3:1). We should not be surprised if the world hates us (v. 13). God, Who is in us, is greater than he who is in the world (v. 4). Even when it seems that we are losing the battle, God is always in control. Those who are of God will listen to us (v. 6). We can have boldness in the day of judgment (v. 17). “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (5:4). There is the “overcoming” theme again.

The Revelation of John, who was exiled on the Island of Patmos because of preaching the Word of God (1:9), begins with letters to the seven churches of Asia. John was told what to write by Jesus Christ Himself, a description of Whom is found in verses 11 through 30 of chapter 1. He is “alive for evermore” and said, “I have the keys of hell and of death” (v.18). The first letter is to the church in Ephesus (2:1–7). Most of the letter is commendation for their endurance, for their hatred of evil, and for not fainting; but then Christ says, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (2:4). We might think that, after all they had suffered, and all they had done for the cause of Christ, they were pretty good folks. But we often don’t think the way the Father and the Son think. They had fallen and they needed to repent. The fire of their love had gone out. We can never relax; we can never let down our guard. The Christian’s fight is a day-in, day-out lifetime commitment. No vacations, no holidays.

“To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). That is a wonderful promise, but it doesn’t come cheaply. We must **overcome**. The church in Smyrna was about to experience terrible persecution, They were commended, first, and then told, “Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (v. 10). That means, “Be faithful to the point of giving your life for Christ if need be.” “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (v. 11). If we would escape the second death, we must overcome.

Pergamos and Thyatira were faithful, for the most part, but were tolerating some sin in their midst. This could not be allowed to pass, if they would overcome and be given a reward (Rev. 2:12–26). Even in Sardis, which received severe rebuke, some were found who had not defiled their garments. They were promised that they would walk with Christ in white (3:1–4). Those who overcome will be clothed in white, and will have their names written in the Book of Life and confessed before the Father (v. 5). The church at Philadelphia had kept the Word of Christ and had not denied His name (v. 8). He would make their enemies know that He loved them (i. e., the Philadelphia church) (v. 9). Wouldn’t it be great if He could say that of us?

Laodicea received no commendation at all, but a severe threat (Rev. 5:14–19). “As many as I love, I chasten” (v. 19). “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (v. 21). Do we see a theme here? “To him that overcometh...” There will be no reward unless we remain faithful through whatever trials Satan sends our way. In chapter 20

verse 10, we are told that the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. God has promised: The devil will be cast into the lake of fire! But with him will be the false prophets, too. They will all be vanquished, if only we will be faithful.

The judgment scene is depicted in Revelation 20:11–12, when those who have not been faithful will try to run away, but there will be no place to hide. All of the dead will stand before God, and we will be judged out of the Book of Life, according to our works. How awesome (in the true sense of that much-abused word!). “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Isn’t it worth whatever we have to go through in order to have our names written there and not be cast into the lake of fire?

### **“GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS”**

(Rev. 21:6)

The most beautiful description of Heaven in the entire Bible is found in Revelation 21 and 22. “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. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (21:6–7). The dark side of this picture is that “the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (v. 8). There are some pretty bad characters in that list. But did you notice that **the fearful** have a place in it? How many of us does that describe? We must overcome a cowardly fear that shrinks from

persecution for righteousness' sake. And how about **all liars**? There is no classification of "little white lies" and "big bad lies"; it's "all liars." Might we want to do some self-examination here, particularly when we are thinking up excuses for not doing what God commands?

The remainder of Revelation 21 (from v. 9) and the whole of chapter 22 are given over to a description of Heaven. Doubtless this description does not do justice to what we will see when we get there. John's words were limited to what human minds could express and comprehend. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (22:14). While those left on the outside will be most unsavory characters, there will also be people who **almost** overcame, but whose faith wavered, who lost courage, and turned back. Read this description of Heaven and then tell me it won't be worth whatever we have to give up, whatever we have to do, whatever obstacles we have to overcome, so that we can be there with God and the Son forever.

### **CONCLUSION**

Paul wrote, "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Lest I be misunderstood, I have researched and written this material for myself as much as for anyone else. I do not deceive myself that I have attained the level of strength and maturity I should have. I need these admonitions and reminders. I believe we **all** need them. None of us knows what the future holds, nor the direction our country is going to take, even in the near future. We know the climate is already hostile to God, the Bible, and to Christians, and growing more so by the day. We must be preparing

**now** for the time when we will have to make some difficult choices and take some very unpopular stands. If we fail to be faithful in easy times, how shall we react in the hard times? We must begin **acting** rather than **reacting**.