

CHAPTER FIVE - PART SIX

PATHWAY TO THE KINGDOM

*Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them,
And I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord,
Through which the righteous shall enter. (Psalm 118:19, 20)*

God's thoughts for His children are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give them a future and a hope [**Jeremiah 29:11**]. This future concerns ruling and reigning in the kingdom of the heavens. However, **Psalm 118** emphasizes that only "the righteous" shall enter the gates to the kingdom. Therefore, how we conduct our lives right now matters. We are not to waste our days living according to the flesh and the world. Once a believer is standing at the Judgment seat of Christ the door of opportunity to respond to the Lord is closed, and, if no good works abound, access into His presence cannot be permitted in the age to come.

In this chapter, the spiritual pathway to the gate of the kingdom will be introduced. This pathway begins the moment one is spiritually saved and ends at the Judgment seat of Christ. We will begin by looking at two gates in Scripture: one is the *narrow gate* which pertains to the "gate of the Lord" or the "gate of righteousness" and is the same as the "gate of the kingdom." The entrance to the gate of the kingdom points to the salvation of the soul and regality — ruling and reigning with Christ. It is first referenced in **Matthew 7:13, 14**:

"Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

The pathway to *the narrow gate leads to life* in the age to come. This pathway is the direction that every Christian *must* journey if he desires to have his soul saved. And the Lord says that this way is a difficult path and there are *few* who find it. It is a difficult path because it is an unpopular way, not normal to the ways of the world, a world presently

ruled under Satan. This pathway requires submission and sacrifice, most of all it requires us to lose our life in this age so that we can gain life in the age to come.

The second gate is the *wide gate* and *broad is the way that leads to destruction*. It is the pathway in which many Christians follow today because it is easy, popular and attractive, requiring no submission to the Lord. This pathway follows the desires of the flesh and the world. It chooses the path of self-gratification rather than the narrow gate of self-sacrifice. This pathway to the wide gate leads to the loss of one's soul and separation from Christ for 1000 years. For those who follow this path, they will not enter the gates to the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived. This broad way to the wide gate is not the road to eternal hell for the unsaved. Jesus preached this message to His people (the saved) during His Sermon on the Mount. He warned believers not to follow this broad way as it would only lead to destruction. Therefore, this does not speak of eternal verities, but of millennial verities.

The second reference to the “narrow gate” is seen in **Luke 13:24-29**:

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’

But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from, Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”

Jesus used the word “strive,” which is the Greek translation for the word “*agonizomai*” (Strong’s #G75) and means “to struggle (to compete for a prize), to fight for something, to labor fervently (with all your might).” Jesus exhorts all believers *to fight with all their might* to enter into the narrow gate to the kingdom. This will involve putting aside our flesh and walking according to the Spirit so that we can be able to accomplish this task victoriously. It is the same exhortation that Paul gave in **1 Corinthians 9:24** in “striving for a crown” and “running the race.” In order to run the race and compete for a prize, we must discipline our body and bring it into subjection. Through faithful obedience to the Word, we can then be able to journey through the narrow gate that leads to the kingdom.

The parable of the wheat and the tares in **Matthew 13:24** present *many* Christians who did not overcome this life. They will try to enter the narrow gate, but will not be able. Following judgment, the angels will have separated the non-overcomers from the overcomers. Those who will have overcome will inherit the kingdom, but those who do not overcome will be separated from the Lord, cast out into the age-lasting furnace of fire (**Matthew 13:30, 41-43**). During this time, the Lord will have shut the door to the gate of the kingdom and those who were cast out will plead with Him, in deep sorrow and regret, to open the door.

But Christ will tell them, “*I do not know you, where you are from.*” Yet Christ knows all things, therefore this statement to these non-overcoming Christians can be translated to mean this: “*I do not recognize you as belonging to the group inside of the door.*” It is then that they try to prove their worthiness to be let in. But Christ again tells them, “*...depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.*” These Christians had no good works acceptable to God; their works were done out of their own will to satisfy man and not done in God’s will, to satisfy Him. These non-overcomers made no attempt to truly seek the Lord through His Word, i.e., *know Him*. If they would have been faithfully obedient to His Word, then the works would have been *according* to His Word and for His glory. During this time they will see all the overcomers from the beginning of Man’s Day until the present dispensation walking into the kingdom, but they themselves will be *thrust out*. They will weep and gnash their teeth, meaning they

will be in deep anguish and sorrow; painfully hurt; a cutting to the heart.

A comparison Scripture to this can be seen in **Matthew 13:41-43**:

“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear!”

The pathway to the kingdom must be journeyed for the duration of one’s lifetime, with a rest in view at the end. This journey is therefore not a one-time event. Rather, it is a lifestyle of self-sacrifice implemented day by day. There are numerous examples in the Old and New Testament regarding “the journey.” We see this with Abraham, when he journeyed to another land that God would show him. Then, we see this again with Ruth and her journey to the land of Judah. In each case, the journey involved producing “fruit” or good works, with a view to an inheritance in another land. It is these “works” that will be tried at the end of our journey and will determine whether we are qualified to enter the gates to the kingdom or not.

The pathway to the kingdom involves good works based on three characteristics: **faith, hope and love**.

And now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

All three of these characteristics must be seen in the lives of every Christian in order to be able to enter the gates to the kingdom. Then at the end of the journey, faith and hope will be completed, either by death or rapture, but love will continue forever.

“Faith” is simply believing everything God says in His Word. Therefore, our faith comes from reading and studying the Word of God.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

Jesus mentioned in **Matthew 4: 4**, that if we are to live by faith, then we are to live by *every word* that God says:

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

And through the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are able to gain spiritual wisdom from the Word of God. By and through the assimilation of God’s Word, we are able to strengthen our faith. This faith will also produce the hope of the coming kingdom. Even though we do not see Him or the kingdom now, we are to earnestly hope for this and believe that it is true, because God says that it is true.

Now faith is the substance of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8b, 9)

When we became a new believer, we put our faith in Christ. Again, “faith” is simply believing God. We believed that He is the Messiah, that He died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected on the third day. This new faith automatically did three things:

- 1) The believer was granted eternal salvation;
- 2) The believer was given the free gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit;
- 3) The believer was entered into the race of “the faith,” being *offered* a heavenly inheritance as an heir and son of God.

At this juncture, the journey to the kingdom begins. Once a person has been saved, he is to exercise “faith towards God.” By and through the assimilation of God’s Word, faith will grow and works will inevitably follow through the process of laying aside the “old man” and putting on the “new man in Christ.”

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

The subject of works emanating out of faithfulness has to do with the salvation of the soul. We must diligently allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and then we must exercise our faith by being “doers” and not “hearers only.” Faith must not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the wisdom of God. We must search the Scriptures earnestly and then begin to put that faith in His Word into action. This is the race that is set before us and must be run continuously for the entire duration of our Christian life. Christians are to set their course straight to the narrow gate and hold it there, not deviating; and they are to hold their course, after this fashion, “*firm to the end.*” This course allows them to realize their high calling and partake in the future prize.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

Faithful obedience to the Word of God is the central focus. True Scriptural faith and righteous works go hand in hand. We can have all the faith and knowledge of God’s word but if we do not obey it and do what He says, what good is it? It is like reading and understanding the assembly instructions to a piece of furniture that comes in a box, and then assembling it in an entirely different way apart from the instructions, resulting in a messy outcome.

Likewise, if we are not being “doers” of His Word, then we are not abiding in His will; we are going against God and doing our own will. This also will result in a messy outcome. Therefore, we have a choice to either do works out of faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Those who are faithful — those who take what is written in the Word and put it into

practice throughout the course of their pilgrim journey -- will then be revealed as overcomers at the Judgment seat of Christ, for this is the only way in which they can please God.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

By exercising our faith, we can grow from *faith to faith*, moving our position in the coming kingdom from *glory to glory*.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation [salvation of the soul] for everyone who believes [those spiritually saved], for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16, 17)

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Our faith is never stagnant but it is either growing (going from faith to faith) or it is diminishing. As we engage with the Word of God (beholding as in a mirror), and begin the process of *putting off our old man* and *putting on the new* which means we put to death our fleshly desires and conduct ourselves according to the Spirit, then our faith grows and we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not an immediate transformation, but gradual, as we begin to live by faith in what the Word says, going from one level of faith to a higher level of faith. As we make the progression from *faith to faith* then we shall be transformed from *glory to glory*.

This transformation begins the moment we make the choice to commit ourselves to God. Every day thereafter we must work out our own [soul] salvation with fear and trembling until we have achieved a full

transformation. Following our rapture, at the Judgment seat of Christ, those who have progressed from glory to glory will receive glorified bodies and positions of rulership in the Messianic kingdom.

The daily process of growing from faith to faith begins with adjusting our lives according to the Word. It will involve making daily choices to stop the desires of our flesh and do what the Spirit says we should do. Faith cannot be separated from these works, because if we have faith in all that God says, then works should show our faith. And it is these resulting “works” that will be the basis for judgment. At the Judgment seat of Christ, two types of works will be tested.

One type is depicted by the group, “gold, silver, precious stones,” and the other type is depicted by the group, “wood, hay, straw” (**1 Corinthians 3:11-15**). Works will be tried by fire and those works which are comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones,” emanating out of faithfulness, will pass through the fire unharmed. But those works comparable to “wood, hay, straw,” resulting from unfaithfulness, will be consumed by the fire. The former will experience the salvation of their souls and positions in the Messianic kingdom and the latter will suffer the loss of their souls (though their eternal salvation unaffected), experiencing pain and suffering outside of the kingdom, separated from Christ and His light.

Divine good works (those done in the power of the Holy Spirit), classified above as “gold, silver, precious stones,” will result in God’s approval. These works are works done out of faithful obedience to God’s word. The following list provides some of these divine works that will be apparent in every Christian who resides in the will of God:

- 1) Studying the Scriptures, the “Living Word” (**2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:11**)
- 2) Living righteously, holy (**1 John 3:7, 1 Peter 1:15; Titus 2:12**)
- 3) Loving God and man (**Matthew 22:37; John 15:9-13; 1 John 4:7; 4:20**)
- 4) Submitting to the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 4:30**)
- 5) Honoring prophecy (**Rev 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:20**)
- 6) Suffering for Christ (**Romans 8:18; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:1; 4:12**)

- 7) Being fervent in prayer (**Ephesians 6:18**)
- 8) Watching for His return (**Matthew 24:42**)
- 9) Possessing the “hope” (**Hebrews 6:19; 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 1:27; Romans 5:2; Titus 2:13**)
- 10) Ministering the whole gospel of Christ, the gospel of grace and the gospel of glory (**1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:1**)
- 11) Testing the spirits (**1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:21**)
- 12) Worshipping God (**John 4:23**)
- 13) Confessing sin and then putting it away (**1 John 1:9-2:1; Romans 6:11**)

- 14) Enduring trials and testing with joy (**James 1:2; Romans 5:3**)
- 15) Possessing the higher knowledge (*epignosis*); the “mystery” of the kingdom (**Ephesians 3:1; Philippians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 1:9, 10**)
- 16) Being stewards of the Word of the kingdom (**1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:16-18; 1 Peter 4:10**)
- 17) Possessing the fear of the Lord (**Acts 9:31b; Philippians 2:12b; 1 Peter 1:17**)
- 18) Transforming into the “new man in Christ” (**Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:6**)
- 19) Possessing the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9**)
- 20) Submitting to earthly governments, to masters and to husbands (**1 Peter 2:13-3:1**)
- 21) Dying to the flesh, the world and the devil and walking in the Spirit (**1 John 2:15-17; James 4:7; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16**)

The believer must begin with the first divine work mentioned in the list above, for this is where all of the other good works proceed from. Every believer’s good works proceed from their range of knowledge and wisdom given by and through the Word of God. We must first have the knowledge and instruction in order to know what to do and how to do it according to God’s will.

The second part of the pathway that leads to the kingdom is “hope.”

The word “hope” is the Greek translation for “*elpis*” (Strong’s

#G1680) and means “to anticipate, an expectation or confidence, to wait for something with pleasure.”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a “living hope” through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Because of His abundant mercy, God has “*begotten*” (Strong’s #G313 and G1080) meaning to “be born or bring forth,” us again to a “*living hope;*” and this “bringing forth” was made possible through “*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*” In other words, Jesus Christ’s resurrection made it possible for us to be begotten (in the spirit), to a living hope — a hope of our future resurrection and a future life in glory with Him.

This *hope* then is associated with “*an inheritance,*” a future *salvation* (*the salvation of your souls, v.9*) and “*honor and glory at the revelation* (revealing, appearing) *of Jesus Christ (v.7).*

Overcoming Christians will appear with Christ in glory following their approval at the Judgment seat of Christ. Immediately following the Tribulation, overcoming Christians will take part as co-heirs with Christ in the kingdom of the heavens. This is why Scripture exhorts Christians *to always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... (1 Peter 3:15).*

In **Hebrews 10:23**, Christians are exhorted to *hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.* Christians are to assemble together to inspire one another in the “hope” of what lies ahead, and with greater emphasis *as you see the Day approaching.* We need to do this “*without wavering*” meaning “*without faltering or without delay*” but firmly having this hope in view. And the reason for exhorting one

another in this “hope” is so that we will remain encouraged and will not become sluggish in our journey.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:11)

This “living hope” is the earnest expectation of the salvation of our souls whom Jesus, our forerunner, entered in for us.

...to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:18-20)

This hope keeps us both sure and steadfast in our journey, anticipating entrance into the Holy of Holies, in the very presence of the Lord. And Scripture says we were saved in this hope,

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (Romans 8:24, 25)

We have this hope because of our faith in the Lord. His future appearing is the “blessed hope,” referenced in **Titus 2:13, 14**:

...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

The word “blessed” is the Greek translation for *makarios* (Strong’s #G3107) which means “fortunate, well off, blessed, happy.” This blessed hope is connected with the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. With this in mind, the verse could be translated to mean this:

“Awaiting that fortunate hope, which is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, who is Jesus Christ.”

For this reason, Paul prayed that the Church would have a full understanding of “the hope of His calling.” Not having this hope would keep them from striving to enter the gate of the kingdom and the glory of the inheritance.

...that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe... (Ephesians 1:18, 19)

Paul wanted the Church to have a full understanding of the “mystery,” which is the Church being offered ruling positions in the future kingdom. And connected with this “mystery” was the “hope of glory.”

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27)

All Christians are “in Christ,” but only those who are mature and faithfully obedient to His Word have “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In **1 Thessalonians 2:19**, Paul makes reference to “our hope,” associating it with fellow Christians being crowned in the presence of the Lord at His second coming:

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

Paul made it very clear that Christians who do not have this “hope” in Christ for the age to come are ignorant and most pitiful.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. (1 Corinthians 15:17-19)

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14)

God exhorts all believers throughout Scripture to be watchful for the coming of the Lord — this is “the hope.” In **1 Thessalonians 5:8**, the “hope of salvation” is connected to faith and love, which is the pathway to the kingdom:

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

This hope has nothing to do with the salvation that we already possess (salvation of the spirit), but a future salvation (salvation of the soul) that will not be realized until the coming of the Lord.

In **1 Timothy 1:1**, Paul refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as “our hope.”

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope...

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2, 3)

When we have *this hope*, we strive to be faithfully obedient to the commands of God, and to be prepared for His coming so that we will be victorious. Without this hope, our mind wanders away from God and our hope reverts to the things of this present world. From the time of Paul’s conversion, Paul kept his hope in God and never strayed away:

I have hope in God, which they themselves (Jews) also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and

the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. (Acts 24:15, 16)

We must show and exhort others regarding “*the hope*” with a good conscience towards God. For why do we hope for things in this present dying world? Rather, we are to hope for those things that will have age-lasting and eternal value.

“Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths,

And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them. And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.” (Psalm 39:4-7)

The final pathway to the kingdom is “love.”

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

“God is love” therefore love will never fail, love will never end. Love is one of the greatest gifts that God has bestowed upon man. God’s love for us is “*agape*” love, the highest form of divine love attainable. How can we measure how much God loves us?

But God demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Even while we were God’s enemy, living in the lusts of the world, the flesh and the devil, He loved us, had mercy on our soul and showed it by sending His only begotten Son to die for us.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been

reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:10)

Christ has reconciled us to God in the body of His flesh through death, to present us holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight. We must, in turn, demonstrate our love towards the Lord God and Jesus Christ, Who is our hope and our future salvation, our future inheritance:

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

Not only will overcoming Christians dwell in the presence of the Lord, but they will also be like Him, full of power and glory. They will possess the “image” and “likeness” of the Lord and will be able to see Him as He is and not die. They will be justified as righteous during that Day of the Lord and will be ruling over the earth. Through the death of Jesus Christ, we were reconciled to God, in other words, our relationship with God was changed from enemy to friendship. This is what His “agape” love looks like. And can we see how our own choice to die to our flesh and walk in love through the power of the Holy Spirit has an impact on others, especially our enemies. This is why Jesus said “love your enemies.”

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?...

Therefore, you shall be perfect [complete, mature], just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-45, 46, 48)

This form of love is not automatic. We cannot attain this “agape” love apart from the process of maturity in the Word of God, since it is produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a faithful, mature believer.

But as we make the choice daily to abide in His Word this will inevitably cause spiritual growth in us and as a result change our character so that we walk in love. And the nature of this character towards others can be seen after this fashion:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

This is what “agape” love looks like. We have the choice to love one another after this fashion through the Spirit. We must love Him and others in this way because God first loved us. For what does God say?

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **(1 John 4:8-11)***

“Agape” love is unconditional, not based solely on feelings. This kind of love goes against the flesh, against natural human inclination. It is a giving, selfless, expect-nothing-in-return kind of love. It is a godly love that has nothing to do with evil, but only seeks the truth. This love accepts hardship, rejection or persecution and continues unabated to encourage and seek peace. It is a love that is not easily angered or over-sensitive. This love desires good in others and puts others needs before self. It is a love that is gentle with others, not rude or arrogant. It is a form of love that beholds the image and nature of God. This is the kind of love that we should be diligent to possess and to give to others. Paul knew how great the love of Christ was. In **Ephesians 3:14-19**, he bowed down on his knees to God and prayed that He would grant the Church to know this “agape” love, which is the greatest gift of God.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What an extraordinary gift the love of Christ presents in that we have the ability to be filled with all the fullness of God! The way in which we can show this love for Christ and show that the love of Christ is in us, is to show it to our brothers and sisters in Christ. But do not be deceived into thinking that we can make the choice as to who we are to give this love to. This act lacks faithful obedience to God.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal [millennial; age-lasting] life abiding in him.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:14-18)

To love strictly in word is to speak loving words but to stop short of doing anything to prove that love. We must love in deed and in truth to what we say. We can be assured that we are on the right pathway to the kingdom when we demonstrate self-sacrificial “agape” love to our brethren. Love for our fellow believers is evidence that one has passed from death to life in the age to come. But if we hate our brother we will abide in death in the age to come, for we are considered children of the devil:

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10)

And who does Scripture say is our brother?

Then one said to Him, Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You. But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers!

For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:47-50)

Those “in Christ” *who do the will of the Father* are our brothers and sisters. We are to show this “agape” love to them. In **2 Peter 1:5**, the process of abundantly “adding to our faith” is explained. We see that the characteristics we are to add in our walk of faith increase until we have reached the ultimate one, from “brotherly kindness to love.” This process moves us to maturity and good works that provides an abundant entrance into the Millennial kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Brotherly kindness, which is “*phileo*” love, means “love of the brethren.” Brotherly kindness is a love of keeping company and associating with those who are of like mind. It is something we desire as we mature in the Word. When we love our brethren then we are obedient to God and this shows that we truly love the Lord.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also...For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. (1 John 4:20, 21; 5:3)

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have

loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” (John 15:12-14)

Love inspires us to sacrifice our needs for the needs of our brethren. Love for our spouses signifies the marriage relationship between the Church (overcomers) as the Bride and Christ as the Husband. The marriage relationship is seen as “one body” just as Christ and the Church are one body. Yet, God formed Eve only out of Adam’s rib, just as the bride (to be) was formed out of Christ’s rib. Therefore the “two become one flesh” and the love and submission that one has for his/her spouse will reflect on the love and submission that he/she has for Christ. The commitment, honor, and submission that spouses give each other are a test of their faithful obedience to God. It will prove their worthiness as the bride of Christ one day.

We can love in this way because Christ dwells within us. Christ has an “agape” heart and if He dwells within us, hatred never has to rule over us. Christ has a forgiving and understanding heart. If He lives within us, mercy will abide in our relationships with our brethren and our spouse. Christ has an unselfish and humble heart. If He lives in us, we will seek the needs of others before ourselves. More so, Jesus’ greatest desire was to do His Father’s will because He loved Him. This is the “agape” love that we should all aspire to have — to be obedient to our Father’s will because we love Him. This is the essence of being Christ-like.

In **John 15:12-14**, Christ commands us to love one another as He has loved us. How much did He love us? *Christ laid down His life for us.* The supreme example of love is Jesus’ humility in sacrificial service. Therefore, Jesus is our model for love. If believers obey His command to love, they enjoy the intimacy of His friendship. Note that friendship develops as the result of obeying His command to love.

Faith, Hope and Love is the pathway to the gate of the kingdom.

