

## Love And Works

### Knowing Christ's Word

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 24-Jul-93; Sermon #086

I have been striving to get us all to see that God's major work is not preaching the gospel. I do not mean to in any way, shape, or form give us the idea that it is not important to God's work at all. I just want us to make sure that we give things the right priority and that we do not get the cart before the horse. Preaching the gospel is certainly a part of the responsibility of each Christian and, of course, each organization.

God's major work is something far bigger and far more important than that, and that is that He is reproducing Himself. In broad generalities that purpose is shown in the opening chapters of Genesis. That early, God wants to make sure that we understand where He is headed with His Word so that right from the beginning we can begin to process the information that comes along later in the Book with what He has stated at the very beginning as His purpose.

He tells us in Genesis 1 that we are created in His image. There is the first major clue. He tells us in chapter two that we must spend our time dressing and keeping what He has given us dominion over. We are to consciously choose life—remember the two trees that are in the Garden—and we are to avoid sin and death with the utmost of energy.

But all of us have sinned, and like Adam and Eve and Cain, we find ourselves in bondage to Satan whom we have made our master through ignorance and sin rather than God. So we need redemption. In Genesis 3, God is already talking about a Savior who is going to crush the serpent on his head. And so we can be redeemed and get back on the track with His purpose.

It is all there in broad generalities, but it is spelled out much more specifically throughout the rest of the Bible. God's purpose is for us to be in His image. I do not know whether it is any more clearly stated anywhere

than in II Corinthians 3:18, where He says that we are being transformed from glory to glory, from the glory of man, to the glory of God. God's purpose is for us to be in His image.

In the sermon last week ["Holiness (Part Two)"], we heard that God is holy, and that we are to be holy as He is holy. This is the way we become in His image. As I explained, holy is used in a general sense, that is that God is holy in everything. His is a holy love, a holy justice, a holy Spirit, a holy mercy, and so forth. His holiness pervades all that He is. Now it is not just purity, God is a cut above, He is transcendent, apart, He is different than anything and everything.

**Isaiah 55:8-9** For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My way, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than yours.

God is transcendent. God is holy. He is a cut above. He is different. That is the general implication of the word holy—different. The Sabbath is holy because it is different from other days. But it is also because it is holy, that it received its holiness from God, a cut above every other day. This is what we are to strive for. This is what prepares us for being the right kind of witness, of which the preaching of the gospel is a natural outgrowth.

Now one does not become holy by being Laodicean. God, who is the faithful and true witness, as it says there in the message to the Laodicean, says that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They are His children, but they are hardly prepared to do anything for Him except to be an example of what not to do if you are a Christian. Now they have become that way because they have allowed themselves to become that way through their love for the world and also because of their lack of love for Christ.

There is another church of the seven given in Revelation 2 and 3 whose problem is similar to Laodicea, but it is more sharply focused and it is on this one that we are going to focus today after we first resolve another important factor.

To each church in those messages, Christ says; "I know your works." Those people with an incomplete knowledge of Christianity will argue almost endlessly and vociferously that no works are needed for salvation. These people are simply, if energetically and zealously, confused.

Salvation is indeed a free gift. It cannot be earned by anyone's works. But that does not mean Christianity has no works. Why would Christ say, "I know your works," if He did not expect that people were to have them as a part of their way of life, as a part of Christianity, and if He was not, in most cases, disappointed at the way that these people were working? Christianity does have works as a major part of its makeup.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong used to explain salvation and grace and works in a way that I thought was understandable and accurate. He said, "If I freely offered to give to you one million dollars, but you have to meet the condition of walking across the room to get it, you haven't earned the money by simply walking across the room. You worked during the walk, you met a condition, but the money was still a gift. If the gift had not been offered in the first place, no amount of walking across the room would have earned it. You could have walked from here to Tokyo if you wanted to and it still would not have earned you that gift. The gift had to be freely offered first".

Think of this in terms of eternal life. No amount of work, no degree of quality of work is able to earn that gift for you and me. We do not have immortality inherent as a part of life. Immortality is something that must be given, and it must be given as a gift, and this is what God offers us. He offers us the opportunity to inherit the Kingdom of God, thus receiving the gift of eternal life. It *must* be given and received as a gift. But it is given on the condition of faith, repentance, and remaining loyal to Him and to His way.

It is in the area of loyalty in which works plays a major role. We show our loyalty by the way we talk, what we talk about, who we fellowship with, what we do with our time, our knowledge, and energy. In short, we show our loyalty by our works, that is, by our conduct, and what we produce with what we have been given.

This is clearly seen in a marriage. In marriage, loyalty—faithfulness—is a major issue. If one is not loyal, that is faithful in the marriage, it will probably be miserable and it will end in divorce.

**Jeremiah 3:1** They say, if a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again? Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me, says the Lord.

I just wanted to read that verse to set the stage here of what He is talking about. In this case He is talking about a man who divorces his wife, and then she goes out and marries another. And then she decides she does not like her second husband, and she goes back to her first husband. The law of God in the Pentateuch forbids such a thing.

God is saying, though, that His approach is this: His mercy is so great, that even under such a circumstance He will forgive His wife and accept her back. The subject is marriage and divorce. The marriage in this case was between God and Israel.

**Jeremiah 3:8** Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery . . .

Here He is talking about the two nations, Israel and Judah. Israel, remember, has already gone into captivity over a hundred and some years before Jeremiah came along. So God now is comparing what Judah did after Judah saw what Israel did, that is, how they went into captivity. Now God is speaking:

**Jeremiah 3:8-10** "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass through her casual harlotry that she defiled the land, and she

committed adultery with stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart but with pretenses," says the Lord.

God uses marriage as an analogy of His relationship with us. First here with Israel and Judah, and later on with us in order to help us see clearly what is required of us. He called Israel His wife. Israel was not faithful; they were not faithful in that they committed idolatry. God compared this spiritual idolatry as being the same as, or similar to, the committing of adultery in a human marriage.

That is why He calls it adultery. But, what was it? It was unfaithfulness to a vow, unfaithfulness to a contract, unfaithfulness to a covenant, unfaithfulness to an agreement. The two partners in the agreement, God and Israel, said, "I do" to a covenant to be man and wife. God was faithful and He upheld His part of that relationship, but Israel committed adultery through idolatry by worshipping other gods. Israel was not faithful to her VOWS.

I want you to notice here how strong God's language is in the word *treacherous*. That is not a word that we like to use. God calls Judah's unfaithfulness, her idolatry, her spiritual adultery—treachery. That is a word that is reserved for the most despicable breaches of trust. We do not like to use this strong of a word when speaking of adultery. So we soften it; we use a euphemism. We say, "Well, he or she is having an affair." God says it is treachery. God calls it what it is. Treachery is a violation of allegiance, of trust.

Whether treachery or faithfulness, both must be worked at. Whether a person is treacherous, that is, unfaithful, or whether a person is faithful to his vows, both of them have to be worked at. But the one comes easier than the other because it follows the natural course of human nature. That is the treachery. We have all done this; we have all done what Israel and Judea did. And we have done it through sin, and we have alienated ourselves from Him.

Now turn with me to Romans 8. God does with us individually as He was willing to do with Israel and Judea as a nation. He said; "Yes, you've gone out and committed these unfaithful things, but if you'll just return to Me, I'll

still accept you as My wife." He is willing to forgive. We know the condition, though, is repentance.

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Before we can go on, even though we have accepted God's invitation to us, and we have repented, we have turned, we have come back to Him, before we can go on and grow in Christ, we have to understand and believe with all of our heart that we are completely accepted before Him. Do you feel accepted by Him?

He wants you to understand that you are accepted. He wants you to have the confidence that He is with you, that He loves you, that He is concerned about you, that He wants you to be a part of His family, He wants you to be in His Kingdom, He wants you to grow. He wants you to go on. You are accepted before Him. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

**Romans 8:3-5** For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin. He condemns sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Now flash back in your mind to Israel's coming out of Egypt as being a form, a type, of God's calling, of the granting to them of repentance of their baptism, in going through the Red Sea, and then their entrance into liberty by going into the Sinai.

God then used the next forty years to prepare Israel to take over the land. Forty years in the wilderness He prepared them to become the model nation—living His way and being a witness to the other nations. Do you see

what I mean? Preparation comes before use. But, they never fulfilled that role because they chose to live according to the flesh. That is what we are reading here.

Paul said that the law was weak through the flesh. Living according to the flesh means to conduct one's life dominated by a human point of view. Sort of like, "well, here's the way I look at it." Now all of us do this. And all of us do it even as Christians. However, a person who is living according to the flesh leaves God out. He leaves out God's Word, he leaves out God's perspective, and he leaves out God's point of view. The flesh is what attaches a person to the world and not to God.

The flesh, when Paul uses it in this way in Romans 8, is not being perceived as physical, that is, the skin and the muscle and bones and everything that are underneath it. Paul does not perceive it as being physical, but as part of the spiritual makeup of a man. Paul perceives it as exerting a power, an influence to motivate a person in the direction of sin. It is living one's life according to natural self-centered desires.

The flesh does not exert its influence in exactly the same way in everybody. Some people are driven by sexual passions. Other people are driven by lust for things, others by security. Many others, by pride and selfish ambition. And so these tendencies in them exert an influence to live their life in a certain way. But the common thing in every one of them is that God's perspective, God's point of view, if they have any at all; the flesh dominates it in some way, shape, or form.

Remember this, the law was weak through the flesh. It is very important to the rest of this sermon. Living according to the Spirit is living according to the flesh's opposite. The Spirit, in Hebrew thinking, is viewed as being a power. In this case here in Romans 8, the power is the power of God. It is God-centered, and thus tends to move a person toward God's point of view.

These two, the flesh and the Spirit, are diametrically opposed. The converted person is in the middle between them. And God forces the converted person to consciously choose between the two. Choosing the right and good is very hard work because of having to overcome the pressure of human nature. God has given us His Spirit that the dominion of sin might be broken, might be

overcome, that we might be victorious over it. Are you beginning to make a connection between Revelation 2 and 3?

God was not surprised at Israel's conduct. And the reason was that He had not given them His Spirit. It plainly says that in Deuteronomy 29:4. He says, "I haven't given you a heart to obey Me". So He was not surprised that they did what they did or that they lived a life completely dominated by the flesh.

You see, the law was weak through the people. There was nothing wrong with the law. It was the people who were weak. We might insert here that there was nothing wrong with the covenant; the covenant was weak because the people could not be prepared to keep it in the way that God would have liked. This does not mean that God was unfair in any way. Because God did not expect them to be able to keep it in the way He expects you and me to keep it, because we have the Spirit.

The problem arose because Israel did not even keep the law, did not keep the covenant the way He expected that carnal minded people should keep it. They could not even live up to those expectations which He adjusted because of their still being in the flesh. They became so despicable and abominable in their disobedience that He had to actually divorce them, and caused them to go into captivity.

Let us go to Revelation 19 and add another factor to this that pertains directly to you and me.

**Revelation 19:7-8** Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory: For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. To her, it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Did you see that? The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Now consider this, the marriage analogy carries right through from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, the church is seen as a bride preparing for marriage.

There is a difference there between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, when Israel agreed to God's proposal and



Moses went through that ritual there in Exodus 24, they were married. When we enter into the New Covenant, we are not married yet. We are seen as a bride preparing for marriage, even though the New Covenant has been entered into. A major difference between the two covenants.

What is happening here is that the weakness of the first covenant is going to be resolved. It is going to be eradicated before the actual ceremony and union take place. What we are looking at in Revelation 19 is the announcement that the bride is now ready and the marriage can take place.

There are four things that a marriage relationship must have to really be successful:

- (1) It must have love between the two. A loveless marriage is a contradiction in terms.
- (2) A marriage must have intimate communion. That communion between a man and a woman is so intimate that they become one flesh. It is like the two become one. That is really intimate.
- (3) A marriage should have joy. This will be a natural result if there is love in the marriage. The joy of loving and being loved is like nothing else. Nothing can produce joy like that.
- (4) A marriage must have fidelity, loyalty, and faithfulness. No marriage can last without it.

Hang on to this thought. Remember what I said earlier, that the weakness of the first covenant is going to be resolved; it is going to be eradicated before the actual ceremony and union take place.

This time Christ is going to be married to a wife who has already proved that she loves Him, has already proved that there is intimate communication, that she is happy with Him as her husband and faithful in every aspect of her life.

Notice how attention in verses 7-8 is drawn to her preparations. Not only her preparations, but also her righteous acts. Do you suppose that her righteous acts have anything to do with the preparation? Absolutely. Do you suppose

that it has anything to do with her being qualified? Absolutely. There are works that are implied here—her righteous acts.

Do not be misled into thinking that her deeds, her righteous acts, have earned her salvation. All through the Bible, it maintains a delicate balance between grace, that which is given, and obedience, that is the right response to it. Here, that balance is shown that the white garments are granted to her. It is given. She has worked, it is implying, but the gift is still given.

It takes work to make a marriage successful. It takes work to make our relationship with God successful. If we do the right kinds of works, there is no doubt that our relationship with God will be successful and God will be well pleased with us. And we will be in His Kingdom.

Religious Jews of Jesus' day had a very strong theological position in regards to works. They believed in them. Unfortunately they were not doing the right works, and their bias lead them to trust in their works for salvation. God gives us, then, with these Jews, a wrong picture—of what not to do in regard to works, or what not to believe or trust in.

Now let me show you two familiar scriptures that show this. Let us go back Mark 7 and just a variety of verses between one and twenty-three.

**Mark 7:1-3** And there are gathered together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of his disciples ate their bread with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

We find in verse four they had regulations regarding the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. And in verse five: "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" Now here comes Jesus' answer.

**Mark 7:6-9** Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their

doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. The washing of pitchers and cups and many other such things you do. And He said unto them, "Full well do you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."

Now they expended a great deal of effort in their religious endeavor to be considered pure by God. But here Jesus castigates them, because He told them that all this work that they were doing, all this energy that they were expending, was being done on useless things. Things that did not make them more spiritual. Things that did not allow them or permit them to really witness for God in the right way.

Instead what they were doing was religiously going about expending all this energy doing things that were nothing more than the traditions of men, and had nothing to do with the kind of works that God was looking for.

**Mark 7:10** Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death.

Can you see the contrast? All this energy that they were expending was being done on traditions of men. Jesus is implying here, "Why don't you expend your energy and your time and effort keeping the command of God. Then you'll be doing something that has something to do with God, and pleasing God."

**Mark 7:13** "Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down and many such things you do."

I have a book in my library that is called *The Code of Jewish Law*. It is printed in fine print. It has over six hundred pages in it. It is a compilation of laws that the Jews in the first and second and third centuries <sup>AD</sup>, during the time of Christ, and the next two hundred years after Christ, compiled that they were required to do as a part of Judaism.

They did not do that because they wanted to make fun of God. They did it in all seriousness. And I am not saying this in order to put them down. I do not

mean that at all. But they had misguided zeal. A zeal, which Paul says in Romans 10, was not according to knowledge. They were expending all this effort sincerely doing it. They were working hard, but expending it all on the wrong things.

Works are a part of Christianity. But what kind of works is it that Christ wants? We have already seen an indication that has something to do with the commandments of God, in contradistinction to the traditions of men. I dare say that those Jews who were faithful to their religion were working awfully hard.

They would put you and me to shame in terms of religious zeal. And it was all for nothing because it was misguided and misdirected. Let us drop down a little bit further. In verse 15 He touches on the subject as it was introduced at the very beginning.

**Mark 7:15** There is nothing from without the man that going into him can defile him. . .

He is talking about dirt; He is not talking about food. He is talking about dirt that might be on unwashed hands or in unwashed pots.

**Mark 7:18-19** And He said to them, Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him because it does not enter his heart. . .

Take notice of that. "Enters the heart." Do you suppose that the works that we are to do have something to do with the heart? The mind, that which drives us, that which motivates us, that which inspires us, that which moves us, that which gives us our point of view.

**Mark 7:19-23** Because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods. And He said, What comes out of a man, that defiles a man, for from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts; adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness,

an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man.

There is a very powerful, straightforward indication that the works that Jesus is looking for involve the things appearing in verses 20-22. Those things having to do with the heart.

I said that the Jews had two problems. One, they expended a lot of energy in the wrong works. The second thing was, that because of their bias, it led them to trust something that they should not have trusted in. That is their works.

**Luke 18:9** Also, He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others.

**Luke 18:11-12** The Pharisees stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you, that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.

Do you see his trust in his works? "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I possess."

We find in Revelation 19:7-8 that the bride indeed has done righteous acts, righteous deeds. She had the right kind of works, but still it was *granted* to her that she be dressed in white clothing. The implication is that the white clothing was still a *gift* from God.

You see, there is a delicate balance there. We are required to work, but salvation is a gift and if you remember that whole series of sermons that I gave on grace ["Justice and Grace"], I showed you also out of the Bible, that every power that God gives us to serve in the body or to keep His commands is also a gift from Him. So we will never be able to glorify ourselves in honesty before Him—that He somehow owes us something. Yet He wants us to work.

God demands work, because it is for our good, it is for our good because it plays a major role in what we are going to be able to take through the grave

in the form of character. It is also for our good because it plays a major role in stabilizing society and making it livable. It provides blessings for us if we keep it right here and now.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The right works do not earn us salvation but yet, we are created for good works. God ordained this from the very beginning. It is the right works that make life worth living. It is the right works that proves to God our understanding of His purpose. And it is the right works which show His love in us. And that love is shown to the world and ensures that the right kind of witness is going to be made for Him.

It is incredible but true, that people worry and argue whether keeping the commandments of God are required as works. Of course they are, brethren. Now remember, we just read, "By grace are you saved." And we have just read that we have been created for good works.

The book of Ephesians is about unity. It is about very diverse people living together as part of a common body. The Gentiles on the one hand, and the Jews, primarily the Israelites, on the other. What we have in common is Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of both. But what do we have to do in order that we can live together? What is going to make life worthwhile? The right kind of works, the righteous deeds, and the righteous acts.

It is the same principle in marriage. What is it that enables two people to live together in marriage? It is the right kind of works.

**Ephesians 4:20-22** But you have not so learned Christ; if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus; that you put off concerning your former conduct. . .

Put off is like taking off a piece of clothing, that you strip yourself of something. Now granted, taking off a piece of clothing is not really hard

work. But you get the point. The clothing would never come off unless you worked to get it off. And that is the way that Paul is illustrating this. Only in this case, he is talking about conduct. We have to work at putting off the old man.

**Ephesians 4:22-24** That you have put off concerning your former conduct the old man that grows corrupt according to the deceitful lust. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind and that you put on [you work at] the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.

God is holy; we are to become holy. This word holy is a different word from the other word that is most frequently translated holy. This word means to be without contamination. Think about this: if you become dirty, because you have been working, you have got dirt on your face, hands, arms, maybe some of it is grease spots, it is very difficult to get it off. Is that dirt, that which contaminates you, going to come off just because you wish it so?

No, we become uncontaminated, we become clean because we work at it. You see the analogy is being followed through here. Everywhere Paul puts an illustration, he is showing that effort must be made in order to become holy, in order to be transformed into the image of God. There is action required on our part.

**Ephesians 4:25** Therefore, [with these things in mind] putting away lying. . .

Now what commandment does that involve? It involves the ninth commandment.

**Ephesians 4:25** . . . each one speaks the truth with his neighbor for we are members of one another.

For those who are involved in lying, it is hard work; it is quite a sacrifice for them to stop lying and start telling the truth. Are the works that Christ requires of us—do they have anything to do with keeping the commandments? Oh yes, it does.

**Ephesians 4:26** Be angry and do not sin. . .

Righteous indignation is fine, but does it take work on our part to hold our temper in check, to control us? Yes, it does—hard work.

**Ephesians 4:26** . . . do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

Does it take work on our part to try to get an argument resolved as quickly as possible before it builds bitterness within us? We might have to really put down our pride in order to do such a thing.

**Ephesians 4:27** Nor give place to the devil.

**Ephesians 4:28** Let him who stole steal no longer: but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good that he may have something to give to him who has need.

Any work involved in that? What commandment is involved in that? "You shall not steal" commandment is involved in that. Does it take any labor to counter what a person formerly did in stealing and now begins to work to earn his living? Sure it does. Is keeping the commandment involved in the works? Yes, very much so.

**Ephesians 4:29-30** Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification that it may impart grace to the hearers. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed in the day of redemption.

Let us jump to chapter five.

**Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love. . .

Does it take effort to walk? Yes it does. What is love? Love is keeping the commandments.



**Ephesians 5:2** . . . as Christ also has loved us, and gave Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma.

**Ephesians 5:3-5** But fornication ["You shall not commit adultery" commandment.], uncleanness [falls under the, "you shall not commit adultery" commandment, because it involves things like lesbianism and homosexuality], covetousness [the tenth commandment], let it not even be named among you, as is fitting to saints. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting: but rather giving of thanks. For this you know that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater [first commandment, second commandment, third commandment, fourth commandment] has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

**Ephesians 6:1-2** Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.

Do works have to do with keeping the commandments of God? Let us let Jesus answer this question Himself.

**Matthew 19:16** Now behold, one came and said to Him, Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? [What good thing shall I work at, that I might have eternal life?]

**Matthew 19:18-19** Jesus said to him, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother; and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, there is our Saviors' own words. "What good works must I do?" I am just paraphrasing what the rich young ruler said. Jesus said, "Keep the commandments."

With that in mind, let us go back to I Peter 1:15. This verse was central to the sermon last week on holiness.

**I Peter 1:15-19** But as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. [Conduct is something done, it is work] because it is written, be holy for I am holy. And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work [his conduct—here comes the advice in how to be holy.], conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear; knowing that you are not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition [Mark 7:7] from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

"In your conduct," "conduct yourselves," "aimless conduct."

**I Peter 4:1-4** Therefore since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind [Christ lived sinlessly]; for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin [does sin have anything to do with keeping the commandments?] that he no longer should live the rest of his time according to the flesh for the lust of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, drunken revelries, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

The evidence from God's Word in regard to what the works are that Jesus requires of us, is overwhelming.

Let us draw this sermon to a close by going back to John 14:15. I would recommend that this scripture be in your scriptural memory banks. It is an easy one to remember.

**John 14:15** If you love Me, keep My commandments.

"Keep" means "do My commandments." Now here is an important key. The love of God, according to Romans 5:5, is shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

"If you love Me, keep the commandments." If we have His Spirit, the love is there. Did you hear me? If we have His Spirit, the love is there. It might be viewed or seen as the making of a deposit in a bank to draw on. God gives us His Spirit; He deposits His love in us in order that it might be drawn upon. It is for our use. It is a gift. However, it takes work to use it.

**Revelation 2:2-4** I know your works, your labor, your patience and that you cannot bear those who are evil and you have tested those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars, and have persevered, and have patience and have labored for My name's sake, and have not become weary. Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

**Revelation 2:7** To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Now to me it is clearly shown that the works Christ is concerned about are the works of overcoming. Overcoming human nature. Or as John put it in another place, overcoming the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is the work of overcoming the persecutions, the deceits, and the persuasions of Satan the Devil, and of overcoming the influences of Satan's world.

Christ is interested in the works of overcoming. They are mentioned together—love and overcoming. In Revelation 3:21 it says; "To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne as I also overcame." Christ had to fight the world. Christ had to fight Satan. Christ had to fight any influences of human nature. And He overcame them perfectly. It took an awful lot of effort on His part. And we are to follow Him in the kind of overcoming that He did.

He strove with all His being to not sin, to serve mankind in that way. Now using the love of God is hard work, because there is a constant downward

pull from the flesh, from the world, and from Satan the Devil. Human nature, the flesh, always wants us to cave in and go its way. Go with the flow.

I believe that it was no accident or coincidence that Christ placed the message to Ephesus first in order, before Smyrna, before Pergamos, before Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea. Remember, "if you love Me"? The response expected is to keep Christ's commandments. It takes the love of God to keep them in the spirit. And it is love expressed for working to keep them.

Because that is what John says when he says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." That is love being expressed in an action. So the first thing that God has to give us if He is going to expect us to do the right kind of works, is the power to be able to do it. And that power is in His love. That is the first thing that comes to us. The first thing that is deposited by His Spirit, to enable us to have the power, the strength, to live according to the spirit, to keep His commandments.

We find love, then, in the first message to the seven churches, right in the context with overcoming. Now if our love weakens, what does that mean? Does it not mean that we are going to gradually stop keeping the commands of God? If we lose our love completely, it is sayonara, all she wrote. That is it. Because there will be no keeping of the commands of God, there will be no subjugation of the self to the government of God. That person will not be able to be ruled by God, because he does not love God.

It takes the love of God to do the works that God expects. Now you have that love, but it has to be exercised. The exercising of it is hard work because of human nature, because of the world, because of Satan the Devil. And it has to be overcome. But the power is there, if we will put forth the effort.