

If We Love Jesus We Will Keep His Commandments

In a January, 2015 interview in GQ magazine, basketball superstar Kevin Durant talked about his personal spiritual transformation after learning about God's love from Pastor Carl Lentz.

He explained that he once lived with the fear that, "If I do something wrong, I'm going to hell. I felt like I had to follow the Ten Commandments."

"But," he continues, "we don't live by that no more. We live by the blood of Jesus. That's how I feel."

Now, I sincerely hope that what he meant was this: "I used to live in constant fear of an angry, vengeful God who was watching my every move, out to get me if I broke a single commandment a single time, with the penalty of hell hanging over me all the time. Now, I realize that Jesus died for my sins and gave me a new heart, so I serve God out of love, not terror."

Yes, I truly hope that's what he meant and that he wasn't saying, "Because Jesus died for me, there's nothing left for me to do, since God forgives me no matter what."

Unfortunately, for many professing Christians today, that's exactly what they mean, and they have forgotten the words of Jesus who said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," and, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me," and, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (Jn. 14:15, 21a; 15:10).

His commandments include living holy lives (see, for example, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7) as well as loving one

another as He loved us—lofty goals, for sure, but things we are called to, nonetheless. His grace not only forgives us, it empowers us.

This is the consistent testimony of the New Testament: “By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him ... By this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 4:3-4; 5:2-3).

To quote Jesus again, ““Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

Or, as expressed by Paul, “ ... But the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who calls on the name of Christ depart from iniquity’” (2 Tim. 2:19).

This does not mean that we are saved by the merit of our good works. Instead, it means that those who are truly saved—those who truly know the Lord and who are true Christians—are transformed by God and no longer live the way they used to live. And if they profess to be followers of Jesus and offer no evidence of a changed life, their profession of faith is questionable.

In the late 1950’s, Mickey Cohen, a notorious gangster, attended a Billy Graham meeting in Beverly Hills.

Although he expressed some interest in the message (as explained by revival historian James Edwin Orr), Cohen “made no commitment until some time later when another friend urged him, using Revelation 3:20 as a warrant, to invite Jesus Christ into his life. This he professed to do, but his life subsequently gave no evidence of repentance, ‘that mighty

change of mind, heart and life' [in the words of Archbishop Trench]."

Cohen rebuked his friend, saying to him: "'You did not tell me that I would have to give up my work,' meaning his rackets; 'You did not tell me that I would have to give up my friends,' meaning his gangster associates.

"He had heard that so-and-so was a Christian football player, so-and-so a Christian cowboy, so-and-so a Christian actress, so-and-so a Christian senator, and he really thought that he could be a Christian gangster. Alas, there was not evidence of repentance. Many have sadly forgotten that the only evidence of the new birth is the new life. The real problem is that some evangelists, like some converts, have failed to realize that the fault lies in the defective message" (from his book *My All, His All*).

Exactly! We offer a motivational, pep-talk, feel-good, self-help, personal-empowerment Jesus rather than the Jesus of the Scriptures, and in doing so, we damn our hearers rather than deliver them.

Again, I sincerely hope that Kevin Durant is a true Christian and that his life has been transformed by the gospel.

But I'm deeply concerned that tens of millions of Americans have heard a superficial message that bypasses the cross and that calls for no repentance and requires no change of life.

It is a message that denigrates God's commandments—as if they were somehow inherently burdensome and wrong—rather than teaches that those who have been "born anew" through faith in Jesus will have those very commandments written on their hearts. And they will demonstrate their love for their Savior by doing what He says.

To repeat our Lord's words, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

If we don't, He is not our Lord.