

THE TRIBULATION SALVATION CONTROVERSY

Doug Stauffer

www.RightlyDivided.com

KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

Turn to Revelation chapter 12.

What does the Bible mean when the New Testament refers to keeping the commandments of God? The phrase is found thirteen times in the New Testament:

- The book of Matthew: 1 time
- The book of John: 3 times
- First Corinthians 1 time
- First John: 6 times
- Revelation: 2 times

Most Bible scholars claim that the Old Testament contains 618 commandments in the Law. Revelation chapters 6 through 18 cover Daniel's Seventieth Week and two verses in this section mention those who "keep the commandments of God" and refer directly to those living during that 7-year period commonly called the Tribulation.

***Revelation 12:17** And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, **which keep the commandments of God**, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

***Revelation 14:12** Here is the patience of the saints: here are **they that keep the commandments of God**, and the faith of Jesus.*

It is important to always read the Bible in context and the context says nothing about keeping God's commandments to save anyone. In fact, the Bible gives many explicit reasons for keeping God's commandments and none of these involves getting saved. The vast majority (6 of the 13 times) is found in the book of First John.

1. Keep His commandments: for the assurance of salvation

First John chapter 2 states the purpose for writing the epistle: it was to remind believers NOT to sin. Yet, it also promises that those who do sin, have an advocate with the Father in Jesus Christ (***1 John 2:1***). It is blasphemous to claim that Christ's advocacy on the believers' behalf can ever fall short.

The narrative continues by stating that believers keep the commandments to provide an assurance of salvation for those already KNOW HIM. Those who do know Him obediently keep His commandments.

1 John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

How does a person know that he knows God? Those who claim to know Jesus Christ and yet refuse to live by His precepts by keeping His commandments are liars. The whole context revolves around keeping commandments in order to have the assurance of salvation. It is important to note that nowhere does the Bible say that salvation can be attained by keeping the commandments.

2. Keep His commandments: to get your prayers answered

God answers the prayers of the faithful who keep His commandments and then defines His commandment as *“believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.”*

1 John 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. 23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Those who do not believe on Jesus do not dwell in Christ and Christ does not dwell in them. The believers know that God abides in them by the Spirit that has been given to them, not by keeping the commandments.

3. Keep His commandments: to know that you love the children of God

First John chapter five builds upon the precedents established in the previous chapters by defining how a person is *“born of God.”* Quite simply: the individual who believes that *“Jesus is the Christ”* IS *“born of God.”* Notice that the Bible says does NOT say that the person who keeps the commandments gets born of God!

1 John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat [God] loveth him also that is begotten of him [other believers].

Verse one continues by drawing attention to the ACTIONS of the begotten one: he loves others who are themselves begotten of God. Most believers lack assurance because they fail to love the brethren.

Verse two continues by drawing attention to the assurance of salvation: how does a person know that he loves the children of God? Answered again with a twofold answer: when *“we love God, and keep his commandments.”*

1 John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

It is important to again point out how the Bible defines *“keep his commandments.”* First John

chapter 3, verse 23 says that “*this is his commandment*”: “*believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.*” All of these truths are interconnected here in First John and throughout the Bible. The passage continues by pointing out that God’s commandments are not grievous because of their simplicity and the fruit they produce.

*1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: **and his commandments are not grievous.** 4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, **even our faith.** 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

This particular passage ends by pointing out who and what are the overcomers: “*he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.*” What is the victory? Faith! Who is the overcomer? “*he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.*” Overcomers are not people who trust in themselves or their abilities; it is a matter of faith.

4. Keep His commandments: to display that you love God

Jesus says that those who love God, keep His commandments.

John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

*John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, **he it is that loveth me:** and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. 22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? 23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, **he will keep my words:** and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not **keepeth not my sayings:** and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*

*John 15:10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 12 **This is my commandment,** That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

5. Keep His commandments: testifies to one’s relationship (Revelation)

When we study the books of Hebrews through Revelation concerning keeping God’s commandments, the study can be enlightening for those who believe the Bible and allow it to be their sole source of truth. It can be damning for those who force the Bible into their own preconceived theories, or ignore context, or reject the Bible as the final arbiter of truth.

In this section of scripture (Hebrews through Revelation), only First John mentions “*keep/keepeth his commandments*” using it six times, followed by the book of Revelation referring to “*keep the commandments of God*” found twice. These are the ONLY occurrences

found in this section of the Bible. Here is the overview from First John already discussed in context earlier:

- “if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3)
- “keepeth not his commandments” (1 John 2:4)
- “because we keep his commandments” (1 John 3:22)
- “he that keepeth his commandments” (1 John 3:24)
- “and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2)
- “keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3)

The details and CONTEXT of First John have already been discussed, with attention now focused upon Revelation and specifically Daniel’s Seventieth Week (aka the 7-year Tribulation period). Chapter 12 refers to those whom the dragon hates—the ones that he wants to destroy. Satan wants to destroy the remnant of the children of God left on earth at that time. How are these believers described? It is a threefold description:

- a) They are the remnant of the seed of Israel (the woman)
- b) They keep the commandments of God
- c) They have the testimony of Jesus Christ

Revelation 12:17 *And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with **the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.***

How does the dragon know who the woman is and who makes up her remnant? He looks for those who are living right and doing right. The believer’s behavior confirms their testimony; it does not save their souls. The believer’s behavior betrays their position as believers; it does not save their souls. Yet, some read into the passage to mean that keeping the commandments of God earns them a position as the remnant and seed of the woman. Keeping the commandments of God does not make someone a believer, yet a believer can be identified as someone who keeps the commandments of God.

Two chapters later (chapter 14) is the only other time that “*keep the commandments of God*” is mentioned in these epistles. This verse does not say that one becomes a saint by keeping the commandments of God but points out that the saints of God are those who live right and have the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12 *Here is the patience of **the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.***

How does the Bible distinguish the saints from all other people upon the earth at that time? The saints are the ones who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus. The lost are those who worship the beast and his image and have received his mark. What stops a person from taking the mark and worshiping the beast and his image? Faith. Three verses earlier the anti-saints are clearly described.

Revelation 14:9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, *If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,*

Those who keep the commandments of God are identified as the saints. This is similar to a Christian who follows the Lord in believer's baptism today. Getting baptized does not save but it surely identifies the believers and sometimes brings the persecution. Keeping the commandments in Daniel's Seventieth Week does not make someone a saint but it surely identifies the believers and will bring the persecution.

6. Keeping His commandments: love is fulfilling the law

The only other indirect reference in First John concerning keeping God's commandments is found in chapter 4. John defines God's commandment: if you love God, love your brother also. This is the common theme: God's commandment involves loving others.

1 John 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

The commandment of God is quite simple! This may be why the next chapter states that the commandments of God are said not to be grievous because loving others has no downside (***1 John 5:3***). Chapter 2 of First John further associates loving others by stating that it is not a new commandment, but an old one that has been around from the beginning.

1 John 2:7 Brethren, I write **no new commandment** unto you, **but an old commandment** which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. **8** Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. **9** He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. **10** **He that loveth his brother abideth in the light**, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. **11** But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. **12** I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

Verse 12 shows that John is writing to believers: those whose sins are forgiven. Those who claim to be in the light and hate their brother are actually living in darkness.

Paul was even more emphatic as he wrote about loving others as the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

For those who might attempt to limit what Paul means about fulfilling the law, he addressed this same subject in more detail in Romans.

Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: **for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.** **9** For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not

*steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: **therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.***

7. So, how is someone saved during Daniel's Seventieth Week?

***Acts 2:15** For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: 18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: 19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20 The **sun** shall be turned into **darkness**, and the **moon** into **blood**, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:*

The Bible says that the sun “became black as sackcloth” and the “moon became as blood” at the sixth seal in **Revelation 6:12**. Now look at the next verse. How is a man saved when this happens—Acts continues.

***Acts 2:21** And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Some will say that means deliverance and that is true according to Joel chapter 2.

***Joel 2:28** And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. 30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. 32 **And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered**: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

See Luke 1:71 and Luke 1:74

***Luke 1:71** That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; 73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,*

***Matthew 24:13** But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be **saved**. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

Context:

Mark 13:10 *And the gospel must first be published among all nations. 11 But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. 12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. 13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: **but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.***

14 But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains:

15 And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house:

16 And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.

17 But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

18 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.

19 For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.