

Program Transcripts

For April 2015



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

April 2015

APRIL 5 – BUT HE LIED

Many people think it doesn't matter what you believe, but this notion contains a very low view of truth. The Lord wants us to know the truth and to love the truth. We must learn to buy the truth and not sell it.

APRIL 12 – NOT BIBLICAL ANYMORE

Many people feel spiritually empty because their church has changed and seems to have forgotten God. If you feel abandoned by the religious group you attend, we are offering the Biblical alternative.

APRIL 19 – THE "MUSTS" OF CHRISTIANITY

The little word "must" is often forgotten in today's religious society, but the New Testament uses the Greek word for "must" nearly one hundred times. Christianity makes demands on us, and there are things we must do.

APRIL 26 – WHEN YOUR HEART BREAKS

When our hearts break and tragedy strikes, we desperately need the help of God to comfort and strengthen us. In tragic times, God has not abandoned or forgotten us. God doesn't take away every pain, but He helps us through it to become better people.

“But He Lied”

If you love the Lord, do you also love the truth? Today we're going to see the difference between the truth and a lie. So stay with us. We search the Scriptures because we know that the Bible is inspired. God breathed out the words that are found in Scripture. God willed every single word found there. Because God is all-knowing and utterly wise, but He never lies, we can trust what we read in Scripture. Humans, on the other hand, don't know everything and are often fooled. We can't always trust people, so we must measure what we hear by God's Holy Word.

Pontius Pilate once asked Jesus the question, “What is the truth?” He must not have been paying attention, because Jesus had actually given him an answer to that question. The Lord Jesus said, “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). The more we listen closely to the Lord Jesus, the more we'll understand the truth.

The Lord Jesus promised, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32) Every word that Jesus spoke was the truth. Because of Jesus we can know what is right and wrong; we can know about our God; and we have an infallible standard by which to judge all things. Jesus gives us everything we need to know about eternal life, and salvation, and godliness. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). We need to listen to the Lord Jesus, because He will never lead us astray.

Our reading today comes from 1 Kings 13:15-18. “Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eat bread.’ He said, ‘I cannot return with you, nor go with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. For a command came to me by the word of the Lord, ‘You shall eat no bread, nor drink water there; do not return by going the way which you came.’ And he said to him, ‘I also am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.’ But he lied to him.” That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray together. O Father, help us to believe what You have taught us rather than listen to those who might not teach us the truth. Help us to always consider everything by the measure of Your Word, the Scripture. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen!

After King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took the throne. Solomon had sinned against God greatly; and because of his idolatry God said that He would tear apart the kingdom. Then Rehoboam came along and he was immature and greedy for power; and the people rejected him; and this brought about the division of Israel from Judah. Jeroboam, who became the leader of these ten tribes to the north of Israel, caused Israel to sin by making two golden calves and placing them in the cities of Bethel and Dan. Jeroboam feared the people would go back to Jerusalem and return to the Lord, so he told the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). Jeroboam claimed that his golden calves represented the God who led Israel out of Egypt. He incited the people to offer sacrifices and burn incense to the golden calves which he had made. They could never, of course, be God. The second of the Ten Commandments says, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of

the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

You have to wonder how the people of Israel could depart from God's teaching and believe such an outright lie. They had to ignore almost everything they knew about God in order to follow Jeroboam's false and humanly-contrived religion. They ignored the truth about God. I'm reminded of Paul's statement in Romans 1:25 about people who “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” How can something man-made create mankind? Of course, those golden calves were not gods.

God saw what Jeroboam did and He decided to send a man of God, a prophet, to the altar at Bethel, where Jeroboam was, and to speak out against the king. This man of God, at God's direction and command, predicted a sign or a miracle. He said, “This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: ‘Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out’” (1 Kings 13:3). It happened just as God said that very day. The altar was split apart, and the ashes were poured out. The man of God left Bethel, going home by a different route and refusing to eat bread or drink water.

First Kings 13 tells us of an old prophet who chased down this man of God and said, “Come home with me and eat bread.” The man of God replied, “I may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, ‘You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.’” The old prophet, however, was not content. So, in 1 Kings 13:18-19 we see a sad story. The old prophet said, “I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.’ But he lied to him.” So the man of God went back with this older prophet; he ate bread in his house; he drank water. Apparently the man of God placed his trust in what the lying prophet said rather than what God Himself had told him to do.

Because of his disobedience, God punished the man of God. A lion met him on the way and killed him. Because he believed a lie, he suffered the wrath of God. Some people say it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love God. That isn't so! It does matter what you believe. The man of God had to learn that the hard way. I hope that you won't make that mistake. If you believe a lie, it could cost you your soul.

The apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, warning them not to follow a false gospel. Paul said, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one (that) we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one (that) you received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).

Even if the source seems credible, such as an angel from heaven, we must not distort what God says and turn it into a falsehood, a lie. Many people, frankly, are deceived by distorted, twisted gospels today. They think they believe the truth, when they have placed their confidence in a distortion of the truth. There is but one gospel, and anything contrary to that one gospel is dangerous to the soul. That's what the Bible says!

Christians must be in the business of helping people to distinguish truth from error. That means, because we love people and we want them to be saved, we must proclaim the truth and

expose what is false. It's not mean-spirited, but loving, to expose error and to help people learn the truth. James 5:19-20 says, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

The apostle Paul taught Timothy, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, (no) but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2: 24-26). Our task as humble and gentle servants of God is to help people who are in error to find the truth, to help them go to heaven. I would rather tell people the truth that hurts for a little while than to tell people a lie that causes them to be lost eternally. It matters what we believe!

Adolf Hitler once boasted, "By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise." Hitler told many outrageous lies. He held that if you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it'll be believed. He realized that people would fall for a big lie quicker than they would for a little one. By telling lies, Hitler and the Nazis were able to slaughter eleven million people in his death camps. The more outrageous the lie, the more some become gullible. The old song says that if you're not willing to stand for something, you'll fall for anything. What we must do is stand with God and with His Word, the Bible.

The difference between the truth and a lie is as great as the difference between God and the devil. The Lord Jesus is the source of truth, but the devil has always been a liar. The Lord Jesus described the devil this way, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

While the devil speaks lies he pretends to be a follower of God. He wants everyone to think he is moral and true, but he has no intention of being moral or being true to people and telling the truth. He is out to fool people into following his error. Second Corinthians 11:14-15 says, "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." Being religious doesn't make a person righteous, and calling oneself a preacher or a prophet doesn't guarantee what one says is true.

Many people, like Pilate, have, frankly, given up on trying to find the truth when it's really staring them right in the face. Some people don't want to know the truth, and some have no love for the truth. Because sin is in their lives and they want the pleasure of sin, many people would rather believe a lie than take the steps necessary to believe the truth. We don't like to call sin, this day and time, sinful, so we lie to ourselves about when life begins or whether marriage matters. We don't like to think of anyone as being wrong, so we decide that just every doctrine is right. We don't like to think of anybody as being lost, so we consider everyone saved. Someone doesn't like the teaching of the necessity of baptism for salvation, so they decide that baptism isn't necessary. People don't want to admit that there is but one gospel, so they will think any gospel is true. People don't like to admit that there is one faith, so they believe every road takes you to heaven. But the fact of the matter is many people fool themselves. People are not the measure of truth; God is and His Word declares His truth!

No matter how strongly we believe something is right, it's false if it contradicts what the Lord says in His Word, the Bible. We need to know that the Lord Jesus takes His Word seriously, even if we don't. The Lord said, "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me" (John 12:48-50). The Lord Jesus knew His words were the measure of truth and would affect our salvation. If we reject His words, we'll be lost; but if we abide by His words, we can know the truth and we can be saved.

When believing the truth is demanding, but believing a lie is convenient and popular, many people choose to believe the lie. They believe what they want to believe, and they'll find preachers and teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. They get complacent and insist that their lie is really the truth. They'll do nearly anything rather than listen to what God has actually said. Solomon urges us, "Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Buying the truth comes at a high price. It means being honest enough to admit that what we have heard in the past may not be true.

Why are we speaking like this? Because many people in our religious world no longer value the truth, and they have bought into lies. We need to be like the noble Bereans. "Now these Jews (that is in Berea) were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, (and they were) examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Have you searched the Scriptures to find out if what you believe is so? Or have you simply accepted what people have told you? Have you tested the truthfulness of what you believe by a serious study of God's Word? Have you taken time to buy the truth?

As humans, most of us have faced the bitter reality that what we once believed was right was actually wrong. We all get fooled, but we aren't left without hope. We can know the truth. Jesus promised we could in John 8:32, and that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). God revealed the truth in His Word, the Bible; but we must take the time to search it out, believe it, and obey it. It's not enough to know the Word. We must let it touch our hearts, to shape our lives. Ignorance causes confusion, and lies cause chaos, but knowledge of God and His Word leads to order and wisdom.

James 1:22-25 says, "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 who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." If we do nothing with what we have learned from God, we've robbed ourselves of a blessing.

If your heart and soul aren't right with God, don't lie to yourself that everything is ok. You need to follow the perfect law, the law of liberty! To become a Christian, to be free from sin, you must believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of your sins; follow God's will. Confess Jesus as the Christ and be baptized, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins. And, do it today!

Not Biblical Anymore

Exodus 1:6-10

Where is the Bible and our convictions these days? Many people feel abandoned by their spiritual leaders. Many people today feel spiritually empty because their denomination or church has forgotten God. Do you feel empty? The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). If Jesus is the way to the Father, we need to know what the Lord Jesus teaches. If we love the Lord, we need to be obedient to what He says. If He has given us His way in the Scriptures, then we need to know what they teach and hold firmly to them. We want the Lord's way because we know that nothing else can take its place.

Many people today feel a little like Rip Van Winkle. You remember Washington Irving's story about the fun loving man, who was a hen-pecked husband, and who hated profitable labor, and how he was continuously nagged by his wife. So he escapes to the mountains; and while there Rip drank some liquor that caused him to sleep for twenty years. When he awoke, he finds that the American Revolution has taken place and everything seems different.

You've probably noticed that our culture has changed in recent years. Both morality and religion seem to have turned upside down. What used to be sinful is now legal, so society is telling preachers not to speak out against immorality. Society says we can't call certain immoral behaviors sinful any more. Some say that marriage is obsolete. Society says husbands and fathers are no longer the heads of their homes. Some are pushing women to take leadership roles in the church. Many who stand with God's Word are amazed and they ask, "What has happened that people no longer hold to the Bible?"

Our reading today comes from Exodus 1:6-10. "Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.'"

I once had dinner with an acquaintance who belonged to a prominent denomination, and the conversation turned to religion. This man told me how much his church had changed and how alienated he felt. He grimaced at the moral and spiritual compromises that the leadership of his denomination had embraced. He felt like he was no longer in the same denomination. What he knew growing up and what he saw in the present were very different. He felt that his denomination had abandoned what it had believed and had become something unbiblical.

Society and secular progressives have pushed many religious groups to accept views that dismiss the Bible. They told the religious world that they were childish and backward believers and must accept what a more advanced society thinks or they will die. They said evolution is proven, and the church must give up its belief in creation. They said the unborn are not viable people until they are born and may be aborted. They glorified non-traditional families and said marriage was obsolete. They said the Bible wasn't for us today but spoke to people in other ages. They decided that love for people was more important than loving and obeying God. They argued that the grace of God meant that we didn't have to keep any rules at all. In the end they denied that God has any authority over their lives or that He matters to them.

Sadly, the more any culture pushes God out of their thinking, and their ethics, or their morals, the more miserable and difficult their lives will become. Societies can't thumb their noses at God and expect the Lord to favor them and bless them. Just because the thinking of a people changes with time doesn't mean that God has changed His mind. Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, and the plans of his heart to all generations." People's attitudes may change, but God's views on the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage haven't changed. Just because people permit themselves to violate God's law doesn't mean that God will permit it. We can't vote on God's will. God is God, and we are not. Wherever you live, whoever you are, God's Word is still binding on you.

The prophet Jeremiah revealed the will of God in Jeremiah 18:7-10; God said, "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, then turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it." God is far more in charge of the affairs of every nation than we might think. God plants nations, and God plucks nations. He deals with nations on the basis of whether they are willing to listen to His voice. Are you listening to God?

I fear some think that because everyone believes or practices something, that it must be approved by God. God, however, doesn't take a poll to determine what is right and wrong. The Lord Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The popular, easy way is not safe but leads to destruction. Only a few people will follow God's narrow way, but it leads to life! Even if everybody tells lies, lying is still wrong. Even if everybody steals, stealing remains sinful. No matter how popular a sin is, sin will never be okay with God. You can't solve the problem of sin by making it popular.

The same is true with regard to religious groups. When people hear the Lord's voice and follow His teaching, He blesses them and counts them as His own. But when an individual or some group ignores His teaching or departs from the way of the Lord into moral or doctrinal error, God holds them all accountable. Sometimes people create religious groups and cults according to their own thinking rather than listening to God. Even if that group grows very large, it's still accountable to God. The Lord created every person and will someday judge each one according to the words that are found in the books. He commands all men everywhere to repent. We're all accountable to the Lord whether we know it, whether we acknowledge it, or whether we agree to it.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account." Time and distance don't erase accountability. A change in the winds of cultural worldviews doesn't release anyone from God's jurisdiction. We're accountable to the Lord in matters large and small. Rebellion over a small matter is still rebellion against God.

I must tell you, more than accountability love is our motivation to follow the way of the Lord. When people love the Lord they enjoy being like Him. The Lord's way lifts up virtue and makes every person better and nobler. Aren't you tired of all the ungodliness, dishonesty, and

indifference in our world today? Aren't you weary of the selfishness, greed, pride, and power-hungry attitudes? Aren't you hungry for what's pure and good? Don't you wish people were kind and trustworthy? We love the Lord, because we have seen what the love of the Lord does in the hearts and lives of the people who turn from sin to righteousness. They become new people filled with faith, and hope, and love. Men become faithful and loving husbands and fathers when Christ is in their life. Wives become warm and loyal wives and mothers when Christ is in their life. Children look to parents with grateful hearts when Christ is in their life. Neighbors respect each other and bear one another's burdens whenever Christ is in their life. Second Corinthians 5:17 rightly says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; and the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Those new things are so much better than the old ways.

Take God and His Word out of people's lives, and people will be empty and in misery. They'll turn to destructive behaviors that enslave them. They will become indifferent to other people; they will be selfish, and ungrateful. They'll seek in vain to find something to take God's place, but nothing will. The Lord's way is so much better than the ways of the world; and we have to wonder how anyone could prefer sin to righteousness, or prefer lies to the truth, or prefer selfishness to love.

When churches substitute story-telling, and pop-psychology, and humor for a study of the Word of God, they've moved from following the instructions of Scripture to being a social club. Paul charged the young preacher Timothy, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound (or healthy) teaching; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you (Timothy), you be sober in all things, you endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5). God expects preachers to preach the Bible, not their opinions, not their experiences, and not their imaginations.

If you attend a worship service that doesn't study the Bible, you're being cheated out of God's message. Has your religious group deserted the truth of Scripture so they can entertain you or make you feel good? One popular speaker has decided that he will not speak out against sin or speak about salvation; he said he would leave that to others. He may be a famous motivator, but he's no preacher of the gospel. He has made his own religion that has references to some of the Bible, but he has cheated his listeners out of the whole counsel of God.

Some religious groups study religious books written by men but never open the Scriptures. They may not realize that the human author may be contradicting Scripture or teaching something false. People who stop studying Scripture often fill their minds with half-truths and mistaken ideas. The Lord Jesus said, "It is written, that Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need all of God's Word to live as God wills. Second Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called us to his own glory and excellence." In the Bible we find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. When we stop hearing the Bible, we can't be sure that what we're hearing is true. Just because someone calls himself a preacher doesn't mean what he says is true.

This is why the Lord Jesus charged the apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end

of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). We must know the truth so we can distinguish what God really says from what people think. Acts 17:11 calls the Bereans noble, because “they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” We too must begin examining the Scriptures so that we won’t be fooled by something that is unbiblical. Colossians 2:8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, and according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Study your Bible; don’t let anyone lead you astray from the truth of God’s Word.

Perhaps you attend where they substitute entertainment for worship; you may be cheating yourself out of true Biblical worship in spirit and in truth. Many religious groups have given themselves over to religious entertainment, where worship leaders and soloists perform religious music like at a concert. God wants everyone to worship Him, not watch someone else perform for them. The Lord Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). When people take the focus off of God and put it on themselves as in a concert, they aren’t worshiping God; they’re performing. Jesus said, “But the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Don’t substitute praising someone’s talent for the worship of God.

Why have I said this? Because I’ve met people who say their denominations and congregations have moved away from the morals and the teaching of the Bible; and they feel empty and abandoned. Some still hold firmly to the truth of God’s Word and still examine the Scriptures daily to see what is true. Please consider studying with one of the churches of Christ in your area.

For some time you may have sensed what we’ve discussed today. Perhaps you’re attending a religious service or you belong to a religious group that doesn’t hold to Bible authority anymore. You’re hearing preaching that isn’t preaching from the Word of God and isn’t leading you closer to God. You are being entertained rather than called to worship. You need the Lord. God said through Isaiah, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). What our sick world needs is not more looking from side to side at what people think or feel; we need to look up to God for His wisdom. What God teaches is far better than the ways of the world. Don’t substitute human ways for what is genuinely from God, and then by doing that rob yourself.

Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” God yearns for every heart to come to Him, for people to leave their own ways and follow His teaching. When people turn their hearts, God abundantly pardons their past and blesses their future. Don’t cheat yourself out of a genuine faith.

To get right with God, place your faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Believing in Him as Lord means believing His teaching is true and necessary to be obeyed. Real faith and real love leads to repentance. Repentance means I will forsake every wrong and turn to what is right and be Biblical. Repent and be baptized into Christ upon the confession of your faith. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins according to Acts 22:16; and He will add you to His church according to Acts 2:47.

“The “Musts” of Christianity”

Is Christianity optional, or are there some things that we must do to serve God? Today we're going to examine the word “must” as it's used in Scripture. The Lord God speaks to us today through His written word; and the Bible says, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:35-36). The idea that faith alone is sufficient to maintain a right relationship with God is simply not found in Scripture; obedience to God is also necessary. In fact, it's a must. The phrase “does not obey” in verse 36 is not the same word as the one that means one does not believe. It translates a word that means one is not persuaded and so will not comply with God's will. When a person will not obey, he faces the wrath of God and cannot have eternal life. This is how important God's teaching is, and why we teach it with love. We want everyone to obey the Lord.

The word “must” is out of step with most people today. It seems politically incorrect to suggest people must obey God's teaching. Our culture is more inclined to make up their own faith or religion or to select what they wish to obey rather than to follow all the teaching that's revealed in the Bible. Most people want choices, and the word “must” means they have no choice. “Must” is a verb that describes an obligation, a requirement, or a moral necessity. “Must” removes every other option. If we want to please God and have eternal life, there are some things that we must do. This really isn't strange, because even Jesus had some things that he must do. My friend, so do you!

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to Mark, chapter 10, verses 42 to 45. “Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, ‘You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

We generally think of God as so far above mankind that He has nothing that He must do, but God's character and love for mankind led Him to send Jesus into this world. Love cannot exist without obligation and commitment. So, Jesus knew that He must do His Father's will. Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work” (John 9:4). While on earth Jesus lived within time constraints, and so must we. We must now do God's will.

Jesus knew that He had to die on the cross. He prophesied His death and resurrection. “From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's’” (Matthew 16:21-23). Though Peter didn't want Him to die, Jesus knew that He must die in order to fulfill God's plan of redemption.

When the crowd came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus and bring Him in to try Him, Matthew 26:51-54 records what happened, “And behold, one of those who were with

Jesus reached and drew out a sword, and he struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?'" The Lord Jesus knew that He must die in order to fulfill the eternal plan of God. He could have stopped it, but it was necessary for Him to fulfill the Scriptures.

Jesus was utterly obedient to the Father, even when the Father demanded everything from Him. When the Father commanded His Son to go to the cross, the Lord Jesus obeyed. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus told them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). I can only imagine the pain that He felt then. The Lord Jesus fell on his face on the ground. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." The persistent prayer of Jesus was this, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

The example of Jesus is vital to us. We've got to follow in His steps. Hebrews 5:7-9 says, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." The Father heard His prayer. Many think the prayer of Jesus was just to remove the cup, and that's certainly what He wanted. But the ultimate prayer of Jesus was "your will be done," and God heard that prayer. Jesus was perfect in His obedience to the Father and that opened the way for us. He became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. We must believe, but we must also obey!

Some say, "You don't have to do anything to be saved. God has done it all." We're saved by grace through faith; and the Scripture clearly says salvation is a gift in Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9 make this point as well. But we must also realize that gifts often have conditions or obligations to fulfill. Meeting a condition doesn't earn the gift, but that doesn't mean conditions don't obligate the person who will receive the gift. For instance, in John chapter nine Jesus healed a blind man by anointing the man's eyes with some mud that He made with his saliva. Then Jesus told the man, "'You go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent)." So according to verse seven, the man went and washed and came back seeing. The Lord Jesus gave that man his sight; and no one would ever suggest that by washing in the pool the man healed himself or earned something so precious as his sight; but that doesn't mean that he still did not have to meet the condition of washing before he enjoyed the healing! The blind man didn't argue with Jesus; he simply went to the pool and washed.

So while we are saved by grace, God's grace is conditional. The Scriptures plainly teach that there are things that we must do in order to please God; they're not optional. First, we must come to Jesus. Acts 4:12 says, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." If one is to be saved at all, he must come to the Lord Jesus; no one else can save him. The Lord Jesus said,

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:26). We must follow Jesus.

Second, we must believe in God. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And 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 seek Him.” Faith in God means believing what He says and that He will keep His promises. It's absurd to claim that we believe in God, if we are unwilling to believe what He teaches. In a conversation with the Jews about whether Jesus was from God and the Son of God, the Lord Jesus said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Faith in Christ means believing that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Lord of all. Believing in Him means taking what He teaches seriously. The Lord must be heartbroken that some people are Christians in name only, and they profess to believe in Christ, but follow after the ways of man.

Third, we must repent of our sins. The Lord Jesus said, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Repentance is not an option for anyone who wishes to live with God. Romans 6:11 describes what repentance does. “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Repentance means stopping our old sinful ways and living for God. Romans 8:12-13 makes it even more clear. Paul, by inspiration of God, said, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” To live with God, we must repent.

Fourth, we must be baptized. In John 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'” (John 3:5-7). This birth of water and the Spirit refers to baptism, just as every early Christian testified. One must be baptized in order to enter God's kingdom. When Saul of Tarsus was blinded on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Himself told Saul, “get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do” (Acts 9:6). Saul entered the city; he prayed and fasted for three days; yet he was not saved. Eventually Ananias came to Saul and told him, “(And) now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). God didn't wash away Saul's sins until he was baptized into Christ. We must be baptized!

Fifth, we must worship in spirit and in truth. The Lord Jesus said, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). Many today have confused worship with various forms of entertainment. True worship differs from pretense or man-made worship, as well. Jesus defines that difference in two things. First of all, is their worship genuinely from their spirit or heart? And, is their worship authentically what God teaches in His Word? If it differs, it isn't true worship. According to Matthew 15:8-9, if their practices come from the traditions of men, then their worship is in vain.

Sixth, we must pay close attention to God's teaching. Hebrews 2:1-3 says, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Some think that God ought to be satisfied with just whatever we offer Him, but the Scriptures demand that we pay attention and keep His commandments carefully. We must not add to or subtract from God's teaching. We have no right to rewrite God's teaching to suit ourselves or to satisfy the whims of our culture.

Seventh, we must obey God first. When the apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin, the high priest said, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28). Peter answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men" (verse 29). We must stand up for our God and our faith above all else. We must never suppose God is content to be one voice among many. God is God, and He demands to be obeyed.

Eighth, we must help the weak. Paul said, "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). Christians must stand ready to help those who are in need, to provide what they can for those who cannot provide for themselves. Christians give of themselves, just as Christ gave.

Why does all of this matter? Because there's one more "must." We must appear before God in judgment. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." On judgment day, you will be there; you cannot escape this appointment. The Lord Jesus will judge righteously, saving His followers and condemning those who don't believe or won't obey Him. You and I must appear before Him. Will you be ready to face God?

In Matthew 25 the Lord tells the parable of the ten virgins. Five wisely prepared, and the other five foolishly remained unprepared to greet their master at the wedding feast. Matthew 25:7-11 says, "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

While Jesus offers His gift of salvation to everybody, sadly not everyone is prepared to meet the Master when He comes. Just as the virgins needed oil, so you and I must not wait until the Lord comes to get right with God. We don't know the day nor the hour when the Lord will return, so we must be prepared at all times.

Have you met the conditions that God demands in order to enjoy His grace? Do you believe? Have you repented? Have you confessed Jesus as the Christ? Have you been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you remained watchful and ready to meet Him? Please don't waste another day unprepared. Get right with God today. Accept His offer of grace by doing what He commands.

“When Your Heart Breaks”

When our hearts break, we wonder, “Does God really love us?” Today we’re going to explore the value of pain. The Bible reveals God’s love in good times and in bad. He hears every prayer and knows every struggle we face. He gives us His Word to teach us, to comfort us, and to guide us through the rough times. You’ll never face a problem that someone hasn’t faced before, and the Scriptures give us an amazing resource to see how others have handled their struggles. God knew what we needed even before we had a need and He gave us this marvelous book to help us. The Bible says in Psalm 119:50, “This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.”

Annie Johnson Flint was crippled and twisted much of her life with arthritis, yet from her pain she developed a sensitivity to suffering that helped her to understand and encourage others who were suffering. She wrote these words of encouragement: “God hath not promised skies always blue, Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through; God hath not promised sun without rain, Joy without sorrow, Peace without pain. But God hath promised strength for the day, Rest for the labor, light for the way, Grace for the trials, help from above, Unfailing sympathy, undying love.”

As Christians, we shouldn’t expect God to prevent every problem. People say, “If God loved us, He wouldn’t let us suffer.” But those who say such things may be speaking too quickly, they may not understand. God may be using a difficulty now to produce a greater good. Heartaches teach us the most important lessons of life. The Bible says in Psalm 119:75, “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.” The heartaches of life may bring us the greatest good.

Our Scripture reading today comes from 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 that, “It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.”

It’s an assumption that the best life is one free from pain or distress. But life free from difficulty is rare, and what seems hard and painful may be what’s best for us. I recently received a letter from a prisoner, thanking God that he was imprisoned. Why? Because he found salvation and a better life in prison. He would never have looked for it in the free world. A jail cell and a hospital bed have often led many a person to change their lives for the better. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:71 that, “It was good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.” When your heart aches, life hurts all over. But if suffering has value and can lead to good in a person's life, then we might think of God very differently. How is suffering good? Let me suggest these things:

First, some "good things" can only be brought about in our character by suffering. The pearl comes not through ease, but suffering. A pearl forms when an irritant, such as a piece of sand, works its way into a particular species of oyster. As a defense mechanism, the oyster then

secretes a fluid to coat the irritant. Layer upon layer of this coating is deposited on the irritant until a lustrous pearl is formed. If there were no irritant, there could be no pearl.

Suffering can help a person know himself, what his character is, and that God can help him endure whatever comes along. Suffering will not only strengthen him; it will also give him confidence to face the future. Romans 5:4 says that trials bring about endurance; “and endurance produces character; and character produces hope.” When God has helped us through one trial, we have confidence that He will help us through whatever comes our way.

Paul spoke confidently in Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes.” Not all things are good, but God causes all things (good and bad) to work together for good for those who love Him. God can take the heartaches of our lives and use them for some greater good. We may not always know what He will do with them, but we can trust that He will use those experiences to bring about good.

Second, suffering can help a person learn what is really important or valuable. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.” An affliction is something that causes great physical or mental distress. It usually comes through no fault of your own. It can, however, wake us up to what really matters.

It is very easy to get our priorities and our lives out of balance, to put such high emphasis on things that don't matter. Suffering is painful, but one thing it does is it helps us to see what really does matter in this life. Having an HD TV isn't nearly as important as being able to see or being able to read the Bible. What really matters in life is whether we're spiritually and physically healthy. The apostle John greeted Gaius this way in 3 John 2, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

The older I grow the more I realize how important my relationship with God is. It's when we're lonely that we most value the presence of God our Father in our lives. With the breakdown of the home so prevalent in our society, many individuals are terribly lonely. The number of single adults in America has greatly increased.

The Lord Jesus understood loneliness. He never had a wife or children. Isaiah 53:3 says, “He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” When He needed His disciples most, they didn't help Him. They slept while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. One betrayed Him, another denied Him three times, the others scattered. Jesus went to the cross and suffered for our sins alone.

Where did Jesus find His strength? The Lord said in John 16:32, “Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” Jesus stayed close to His Father, and that closeness sustained Him through the hard and lonely times. The Bible says in James 4:7-8, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (But) Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Likewise Paul drew His strength from the Father. He said in 2 Timothy 4:16-18, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The

Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Third, suffering teaches us to be thankful for our blessings. A truly hungry person is thankful for something to eat. He's not picky and won't complain. People who have an abundance are often the first to complain when things aren't perfect. Philippians 2:14 says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Ephesians 5:20 instructs us, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

Someone says, “What do you mean giving thanks for all things? How can I give thanks for this trouble and heartache that I'm going through? It is stressful, painful, and discouraging.” I know it's difficult and harsh. When you can't change your circumstances, however, you can change how you see things. If all you can see is the pain, you may be forgetting what God is able to do with that trouble that you're facing. The Bible says in James 1:2-4, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

In Acts chapter 5 the apostles were preaching Jesus in the temple. The high priest and the Council heard of it and locked them up. An angel of the Lord freed them and told them to go back to the temple and preach, and they did. The guards then arrested them a second time; the Council rebuked them, beat them, and told them not to preach in the name of Jesus any more. The Jews usually flogged people with whips or rods. They would hit them repeatedly up to 39 times. The Sanhedrin Council that condemned Jesus meant business towards the apostles with this beating; and it must have been quite painful.

But Acts 5:41-42 says, “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” They saw their suffering as a way to show love and devotion to God.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:12-16, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.” Perspective matters, and if we see our suffering as a way of showing our devotion, we can rejoice even when we suffer.

Fourth, suffering can teach us compassion for the needs of others. Walking through some difficult experience is rough, but it helps us understand what other people who suffer a similar problem are going through. We've been there, and we know what it's like. God may be using that heartache to equip us to help someone else who may not be as strong as we are, and they can't endure it maybe as well as we can. God's comfort trains us to be a comfort for others.

And so the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we

ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ." That is true, too!

We all need the blessing of someone who understands, someone who can help us work through our struggles, and someone who will pick us up when we stumble. Mistakes and suffering teach valuable lessons, equipping us with the understanding and the compassion necessary to help someone else through a struggle that we've endured ourselves. Suffering teaches us the value of kindness in word, thought, and in deed. We learn what it is to receive a kindness and how valuable it is to give a kindness.

Fifth, suffering can teach us the value of prayer and of Bible study. Suffering reminds us of God. Some never think about God until some great need comes into their lives. It's a great day when we come to realize that we need God. We need Him in the good times and in bad. And it's just as important to understand God in those good times as it is in the bad; and to understand that He is always listening to our prayers. The psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:153, "Look upon my affliction and rescue me, For I do not forget Your law."

During the Civil War a friend of Abraham Lincoln was a visitor at the White House. "One night (he said) I was restless and could not sleep. . . And from the private room where the President slept, I heard low tones. Instinctively I wandered in, and there I saw a sight which I have never forgotten. It was the President kneeling before an open Bible. His back was toward me. I shall never forget his prayer: 'Oh, Thou God that heard Solomon in the night when he prayed and cried for wisdom, hear me. . . I cannot guide the affairs of this nation without Thy help. Hear me and save this nation.'" Lincoln knew how much he needed God. Do you?

The psalmist said in Psalm 119:143, "Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight." When your heart aches, go to the Word of God. Read God's promises of love; read His support and His help for His children. God's promises hold true. You can lose your job; you can lose your health; you can lose your security, or your friends; but don't ever let go of your God or His promises. Stay close to God.

We wonder if God really loves us, why does He let us suffer. But love is more than merely keeping people free from pain. Some pain is necessary in life. We couldn't survive without some pain. It's our pain and anguish that teach us necessary lessons and make us want to change.

Much of our heartaches come from sin, sometimes the sins of others and sometimes our own. The pain of sin makes us long for righteousness. Bearing the consequences of our sins helps us to understand why sin is so terrible. God doesn't hate sin because He's mean and hateful. He hates sin, because He knows how sin ruins the lives of people that He loves.

Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God doesn't want anyone to be lost in sin; He wants people to change their lives and come to the Lord. Your struggle today may be the motivation that you need to change your life.

To become a Christian, trust in the Lord with all your heart. God is utterly trustworthy. Turn from your sins, because sin will only lead to more heartache and ruin. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Be baptized. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Romans 6:3-7 teaches that baptism unites us with Christ. And in baptism we're buried and raised with Christ. Baptism is the time when that old man of sin is crucified with Christ and we begin to walk in newness of life free from sin. Won't you do that today?