

# *Program Transcripts*

For January 2017



IN  
**SEARCH**  
OF THE LORD'S WAY<sup>®</sup>

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**January 2017**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JANUARY 1 – GOD'S WORD**

As we begin a new year, we should give serious consideration to reading God's word, which is able to blessing us in numerous ways. When people fail to study the word of God, they cheat themselves out of a blessing greater than gold.

## **JANUARY 8 – NOT TOO HARD**

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and comes today in hundreds of languages. Some think the Bible is too hard to understand. Is it really? In this lesson we'll discuss whether we can understand the Bible.

## **JANUARY 15 – PREPARE YOUR HEART**

The future is always approaching faster than we imagine for our children. We must be a generation that prepares our own hearts and the hearts of our children to serve the Lord and not be fooled by the ways of the world.

## **JANUARY 22 – THE SANCTITY OF LIFE**

Life, even in the womb, is precious to the Lord and must not be taken lightly. Abortion remains one of our world's greatest sins. How does God see the baby in the womb? Are they just tissue or does God think of them as persons?

## **JANUARY 29 – CHRISTIAN MORALITY**

A recent poll found three-fourths of Americans saying moral values in the United States are getting worse. Why is America becoming more immoral? We want to explore the causes of America's moral decline and what we can do about it.

## God's Word

Of all the books in the world, no book is so holy and so true as the Bible. Today, we're going to see many important reasons to hear and to follow the Bible. The Scriptures show themselves to be true time and again! God gave us this unique and marvelous book to be the source of the truth that leads to eternal life. No other book has so many prophecies, practical advice, or relevance. The Scriptures gives us the wisdom that we need to live as Christians and as heirs of eternal life in a world that doesn't always understand or appreciate us.

I was blessed eight years ago to come to In Search of the Lord's Way. The Lord permitted me to be a part of this great ministry to America and many other nations. We all miss brother Mack Lyon and are deeply grateful for what he has done. We're also deeply grateful for all the churches and individual Christians who pray for us and are behind this ministry. We're praying that God will give us many more years to serve and preach the gospel of Christ to the nation and the world. As we begin this New Year, please keep us in your prayers.

I challenge you to read the entire Bible during 2017. Reading God's Word and hearing His wisdom and truth is the most valuable way to use your time. First Peter 2:1-3 says, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." I hope that you hunger and thirst for God's Word. Nothing else will bless you more than knowing and practicing God's will!

Our reading today is from Psalm 1. "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish."

What is your delight? What is it you look forward to each day? The psalmist said the blessed person has a delight "in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." The more one studies the Word of God, the more that Word will become a delight. David said, "They (speaking of the Scriptures) are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10).

Romans 1:2 calls the Bible the "holy Scriptures"; and 2 Timothy 3:15 calls them the "sacred writings." Repeatedly, the Scriptures claim to be the very Word of God. Henry Morris estimates that the Old Testament claims to be the Word of God some 2600 times. The Lord Jesus considered the events of the Old Testament to be real history. Jesus took Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the great fish as historical. Jesus used the punishment of Lot's wife as a means to warn his disciples not to turn back (Luke 17:32). There's no evidence that Jesus ever regarded the creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, or any other story of the Bible as a myth or a fable.

Jesus underscored the truthfulness of the book of Genesis when He referred to the "beginning" of creation as the time when a man and a woman were created and joined together by God in marriage. Jesus said, "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his

wife, and they shall become one flesh. So they're no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:6-9). By quoting from the creation account in Genesis, the Lord Jesus acknowledged its authority. By using the words, "What God has joined together..." He recognized God to be the author of these Genesis writings.

No one can destroy the Word of God because no one can conquer God. Just like God, the Scriptures are everlasting. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven." The Lord Jesus could say, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Again, the apostle Peter calls the Word of God an imperishable seed. First Peter 1:22-25 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." Yes, the Word of God, found in the Bible, is here to stay and it will last till the end of time.

The Bible contains the mind and the heart of God. We can know God best by reading the Bible. He loves us and has always wanted the best for us. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." From the very beginning, God has always wanted that close relationship with each person. He's wanted each of us to live godly lives and to stay away from the sinful things that destroy us. The Bible is honest about people. It tells the good and the bad. It teaches us how to live wisely and how to avoid the pitfalls. Psalm 119:9 asks the question, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" The answer is, "By keeping it according to Your Word." One can say along with the psalmist, "Your word have I treasured up in my heart, That I may not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). Have you treasured up the Word of God in your heart? If you haven't, do you realize how you have cheated yourself?

The Bible offers us the precious gift of truth. We need the truth, not a lie. We want to know what's real, not a myth and not a fantasy. I would rather know the truth that hurts for a short time but blesses me eternally than to hear a lie that pleases for now but costs me my soul. The Scriptures give us that key to sort through the many voices of our day and to be able to unlock the truth. The psalmist proclaimed, "The sum of Your word (that is, the sum of what's written in the Bible) is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting" (Psalm 119:160). The Lord Jesus could say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). He promised, "If you continue in My word (that is the words He taught, the words that are recorded), then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). The Lord Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word (speaking to His Father, Your word) is truth" (John 17:17). The Lord Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

Because the Word of God is inspired and true, we can have hope. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." The Word of

God tells us where we came from, why we're here, where we're going when we die, and what the promises of God are! They give us true answers and they give us hope that there's something better than this sinful and dark world that we live in today. Sometimes we think we face problems that no one has ever faced before, but there's usually a circumstance in the Scriptures much like our own. God helped the saints of old, and He can help and He will help us, too! God's character hasn't changed. He shows compassion on those who love and obey Him. He'll help us through every struggle and every heartache.

I love the promise of 1 Peter 5:8-10, where Peter says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

Were it not for the Scriptures we would know very little about God and His ways. We wouldn't know what the eyewitnesses said about Jesus. We wouldn't know anything about creation or heaven. We would be as ignorant as the Stoics and the Epicureans who built an altar to an unknown God. It's Scripture that opens up God's heart, God's truth, and His promises to us.

God gave us His Word to save us. The apostle Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). James 1:21 says, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive that word (that is the word that's in the Bible) that's implanted, which is able to save your souls." When Peter came to Cornelius' house, he brought "words" by which Cornelius and his household were saved (Acts 11:13). Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Second Corinthians 5:19 says the gospel, is the "word of reconciliation." Philippians 2:16 calls it the "word of life." The Lord Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).

Because the word is inspired and true, it has power to reach into our hearts and souls. Jeremiah 23:29 says about the Word, "'Is not My word like fire?' declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'" At some point the Word of God hits us between the eyes with a truth that we need to hear. Its truth stuns us, even cuts us to the heart, but in the end it blesses us. Acts 2 tells us about the response of the Jews when Peter preached about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Verse 37 says: "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" Verse 38 gives the answer, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

These folks were guilty of Christ's death on the cross. I'm sure they didn't at first want to hear about their sin against God. They probably didn't want to know that they had crucified the Lord and the Christ who was the Son of God; they needed to face the truth. The Word reproves them, and reproves us and it rebukes us, not because the Word of God is cranky or mean-spirited. The Scriptures speak out against sin but they don't leave us hopeless and unredeemable. It informs us in order to protect us from evil and to deliver us from sin. It helps us see where we're going; and when we're going in the wrong way, it straightens us out

so we can go in the right way, in a direction that will help us save our souls.

In Proverbs 2, a father is trying to impart God's wisdom to his son. He wants his son to "seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures." If his son pays attention and treasures up God's wisdom, then God "stores up sound wisdom for the upright; and He's a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones" (Proverbs 2:7-8). Many books can give you the wisdom of men, but only the Bible can give you the wisdom of God.

Beyond all this, the Scriptures help us to see ourselves spiritually. There are times that we need to see ourselves, so we can make the changes necessary to please God. James 1:22-25 says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he's looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." Don't just listen to God's Word, do it!

Why does all this matter? It matters because our relationship with God is involved. Listening and obeying is the basis of our relationship with God. The apostle John said, "By this we know that we have come to know Him (that is, have a relationship with Him), if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I've come to know Him,' and doesn't keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected" (1 John 2:3-4). When you listen and obey, you show true and perfect love for God. Do you love God?

Robert Johnson of Longview, Texas, recently wrote: "We must never be ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's will. It possesses those same qualities that God Himself possesses, endued with His divine authority. It will never fail. Though everyone has free will, and many will choose to ignore it, or try to alter it, or reject it altogether, the gospel will endure. The one who has committed his or her life to it will not be disappointed, as through His word, God will accomplish His good work of salvation. May we be committed to its principles and precepts, to living them out in our daily lives, and faithfully communicating them to those around us. Those who take their refuge in the enduring word of God, shall endure forever with Him. 'Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him' (Proverbs 30:5)." Thanks, Robert.

When people distort God's word to fit themselves, they cheat themselves and those who agree with them. Sadly, people often try to make the Bible teach something false. They're only fooling themselves. When you distort doctrine, you have a distorted disciple. The Bible frequently says, "Be not deceived," and it says that because people often lie to themselves rather than face the truth. That's why we must continually listen closely to Scripture.

I worry about those who think they've been saved but haven't listened closely to Scripture. Don't be fooled. The Bible teaches that one must believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God to be saved (John 8:24). Out of love for God, one must repent of sin and turn to righteousness to be right with God (Luke 13:3). A loving, penitent believer then must confess their faith and be baptized into Christ. Just as those on Pentecost needed to be baptized to have their sins forgiven, so do we. Baptism is the time that God sets us free from sin (Romans 6:3-7). I hope that you're going to listen to God's Word and obey it.

## Not Too Hard

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and it comes today in hundreds of languages. Some think the Bible is too hard to understand. Is it really? God's way is always a blessing. God loves us and He gave us His will in written form in the Bible so that every age and every nation could know the truth and be saved. God wants every person to come to faith and to obey His will.

Perhaps you've heard people say, "The Bible is not meant to be understood." Or, "The Bible says different things to different people." Or, "What is important is not so much what the Bible says but what the Bible says to me." I've heard people claim, "The New Testament addressed the culture of the first century and really doesn't speak to us at all." Others dismiss God's Word by saying, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere and love Jesus." Then there's the skeptic who says, "You can make the Bible say anything you want it to." Some say, "You can just take a passage of Scripture and read it to a group of people and there'll be as many interpretations of that passage as there are people in the room."

These charges against the Bible lose sight of God's purpose in giving us His Word. They seem to forget about God's incredible desire to have a relationship with us that lasts for an eternity. That relationship means that we can know Him and His will. The Lord Jesus promised us, "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).

Today's reading is from The Gospel According to Luke; we will look at the introduction, the first four verses of the book. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." That's an introduction to this gospel account, and one that gives us a lot of information about the Bible, and how the words of Jesus came to us.

Is the Bible meant to be understood? The answer is yes, but let's see what the Bible says for itself. Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Verse 125 says, "I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies." Verse 130 says, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." Proverbs 6:23 says, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life."

When people say that the Bible is not meant to be understood, I wonder how they came to that conclusion. Did they get it from the Bible or from people? Surprisingly, some churches don't want you to read your Bible. These churches worry that if you read your Bible, you'll find that what the Bible teaches is different from what they teach and practice. The Bible has God's authority attached to it, and it challenges those who vary from it.

The apostle Paul warned in Scripture that there were people who were misusing and tampering with God's Word. The Bible says, "But we have renounced disgraceful,

underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with (that is, twist) God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2-4).

The devil will do anything to keep people from understanding the truth of God's Word. He'd love to blind people to the gospel so they wouldn't know the truth. If he can tamper with; that is, twist the Word so that you begin to believe something that is only partially true, he'll do it. He realizes that his message must sound true or you won't buy into it. If he tells a lie that sounds true, he can lead people astray. If he can tamper with the Word to make his lie really appealing, he will. But, when people obey the lie rather than listen to God, they are deceived with a counterfeit religion. The devil has supplied plenty of counterfeits today.

We wouldn't know what the truth is and what error is if it weren't for that permanent standard of truth. The Bible provides that standard of truth for all time. God's Word is settled in heaven and does not change. It's this stability, this solid foundation, that allows Christians to remain united to God. God was wise to give to mankind His message in written form in the Bible because by giving us the Word, the written Word, we can know the truth which makes us free. The difference between Christ's true disciples and others is that true disciples remain in the Word of God, and the others drift away from it.

This is why we must stay with God's Word. God expected ancient Israelite parents to teach their children the Law of God. The Lord God was concerned that a generation might arise that didn't know His commandments. So, Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 31:10-13)

If the Bible were so hard to understand, God wouldn't have commanded all Israel to go through this every seven years. Truly we can understand the Bible. The Bible says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). God gave us His Word to bless us.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 explains, "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It's not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." God not only wants us to understand it, He also expects us to love and obey it.

The Word of God went out to all Israel. There were all kinds of people listening. They were the smart; they were the not so smart, the conservatives, the liberals, the educated, the



young, and the old. Those who didn't know God's Law were expected to learn the Law and to obey it. My friend, you are not an exception. God wants you to know His will. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God doesn't communicate in riddles, nor does He hold back some secret message only for the select few. God wants everyone to be able to know the truth, to be saved, and to live in heaven with Him forever. Jesus, the Bible says in Hebrews 2:9, tasted death for every person. Why then would God give us a Bible with the words of life, but give it in such a way that we couldn't understand it?

When God inspired Luke to write a gospel account, he chose this Greek Gentile, Theophilus, a Roman authority, to write to about Jesus. Theophilus had only heard bits and pieces about Jesus, so here is what the inspired Luke wrote in Luke 1:1-4: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught."

Theophilus apparently wanted to know the truth, and Luke wrote to him with certainty (that is, exact knowledge) the things concerning Jesus Christ. The Bible was written to impart to us true knowledge, exact knowledge, and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle John said, "Therefore many other signs (that is, miraculous events) Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). God gave us this book, the Bible, so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and by believing be saved and have life in His name. I can't imagine why, if this is the purpose of the Bible, that God would write something that no one can understand. The fact is, we can understand what we need to know to be saved, and go to heaven and live with God forever!

In Acts 17:2-4 the Bible says, "And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, and as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women." The Scripture is not some strange riddle, but a book that gives life and tells the marvelous story of Jesus Christ.

From this inspired book, we learn the most wonderful story of love and sacrifice. To some it may be meaningless, but to us it's the most meaningful story in the entire world. I'm so thankful that God chose men and inspired them to write that story down in the first century, and He did it so that we could hear and could read it as it really happened. The New Testament gives us eyewitness accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a story of good news that saves our souls. There simply is no better, no more important, no more meaningful story in the entire world, than the story of Jesus.

The gospel is God's power unto salvation to everyone who believes it, according to Romans 1:16. God knew that He had to reveal Himself to mankind if they were to know and believe in Him and find salvation. We can know some things through observing the universe, but we cannot know the full story apart from the Word of God. The Bible says, "For since in

the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased that through the foolishness of the message preached He could save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). If we want to know the precious truth about God, we must go to His Word. Our task is to hear it, to believe it, to love it, to obey it, and to share it with others. Oh, thank God for the Bible!

The apostle Paul said, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand it until the end" (2 Corinthians 1:13). Paul wrote no other thing but what the Corinthians could understand, and we too can understand the Bible. In fact, we must understand the Word of God and obey it. Why? Because one day we'll be judged by the written Word of God. The Lord Jesus said: "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word that I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). You and I will be judged one day by the words that are written in this book. We'll stand before God and we'll give an account for our lives, and the standard will be these written words.

The Lord Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). For that reason, we must know what the will of God is. We mustn't let anything keep us from our devotion to the Lord. The purest source of God's will is found in the New Testament. So don't settle for anything less than the Scriptures. They will lead you to an exact knowledge of the Lord's will, but other things will lead you astray. The Scriptures will give you the unfailing truth that leads to eternal life. That's what we need. What kind of God says, "I'm going to judge you by the things written in the books?" Revelation 20:11-15 teaches us that we're going to come before the great white throne, and that the books will be opened, and we will be judged according to the things written in the books, and according to the things that we've done, whether good or bad. Jesus said in John 12:48 that we're going to be judged by His Words. Why would He give us this book, and tell us we're going to be judged by these words, but give us a book that is a riddle that people cannot understand? Wouldn't such a God be a monster? But our God isn't like that. He gives us a book that we can understand. Our God loves us and wants all men to be saved and to know the truth. Shouldn't we strive to know His will? If our knowing and doing the will of God is the difference between eternal life and death, can we afford to ignore what He says?

The apostle Paul said, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). God wants us to study the Bible so that we will know the truth and not be ashamed on the Day of Judgment because we didn't follow the teaching of the Bible. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding."

Oh, I hope you'll follow those teachings and come to Christ. To do that hear the words of Christ and believe them. Repent of your sins and confess the name of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Repentance means that you change your heart, that you leave sin, that you turn to the ways of God. With love and faith, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins as Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 teach. Romans 6:3 says that when we're baptized into Christ, we're baptized into His death. That's when we come into contact with the blood of Christ that cleanses us. Won't you be baptized, my friend? Won't you do it today?

## Prepare Your Heart

What is in your heart? Do you have a heart prepared to hear what God has to say? Do you have a heart prepared to meet God? Paul said, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). That's our goal, too! We want to have that pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. We fervently want that for each of you as well. We want everyone to know and to love the Lord. That's why we go to the Lord Jesus to find "the words of eternal life" in Scripture. He is our hope and our delight! He is our Savior, and we need Him.

The Scriptures speak about the heart and how it is the center of our very being. The heart is where we think, where we feel, where we choose, where we plan, and where we determine what we will or we won't do. The Lord Jesus said, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). Our hearts, more than anything else, define our character and our disposition. The heart determines whether we care and to what extent we'll make a commitment. Proverbs 4:23 warns, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life."

If we're not careful, our hearts can deceive us. We can imagine something is true because we want it to be true. God said, "The heart is more deceitful than all else, And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Don't imagine that God doesn't care about our ways and our deeds. We can come to the Lord "just as we are," but we cannot remain that way. God expects our hearts to change, to leave the things that oppose His will, and to grow to be people who delight in pleasing Him.

What is in your heart? Many years ago a man was angry and he went into a long tirade cursing and taking the name of the Lord in vain in the presence of a faithful Christian woman. This man had once attended church and had once been a believer. But once he finished his ungodly speech, she asked him, "Don't you fear God?" Perhaps that's something we should all ask ourselves, "Don't you fear God?"

Our reading today comes from Psalm 78:5-8. "For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments, And not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God." That's a great admonition to us. Let's pray. Father we're grateful that You have given us Your Word, that we might know those stories of old that teach us and help us to understand what You would have us to do and to be. Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

If we are to prepare our hearts to have a relationship with God, we must do four things. First, we must put our confidence in God. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." It's easy to think that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and know more than our ancient God. Of course, God is not like us. He's much wiser about life; He's seen men and women fall into the immoral traps that can destroy them. He can see the future that lies hidden to us. That's why we

trust Him and hold to His hand.

Second, we must not forget the works of God. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” Every blessing that we enjoy comes from our Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus said, “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). Our food, clothing, housing, and all of our spiritual blessings – all of them come from Him. So, we remember the Lord Jesus dying on the cross, suffering for the forgiveness of our sins. We remember His promises to care for us, to comfort us, to strengthen us, and to never forsake us. We’re blessed to have a Father who hears our every prayer. We cannot forget what He has done for us.

Third, we must keep His commandments. Love and gratitude lead us to respect and to observe what He’s taught us, His commandments. Some people think of obedience as slavery, or legalism, or a thoughtless ritual. Actually, obedience from the heart is none of these things. Jesus willingly and lovingly endured the cross, taking the form of a servant. Obedience humbles us, yes, it humbles us! But it humbles us for the better. If we wish to be great in God’s eyes, we must learn to obey as a servant. The Lord Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Though He despised the shame of the cross, He endured it for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Fourth, we must not allow ourselves to become stubborn and rebellious. Our deceitful hearts can lead us to think that we can challenge God, as if we knew more or we knew better than He does. Selfishness and pride can lead to a false heart and a loss of faith. It’s folly to think we can do better without God than with God. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Again Proverbs 14:15 says, “The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.” Once more Proverbs 22:3 says, “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive they just go on, and they’re punished for it.” Don’t imagine that you can love sin, that you can rebel against God, and then go unpunished. God sees and God knows!

Instead, prepare your heart to be faithful, loving, and obedient. Build up your faith in God and stop doubting! You’re not an accident; God created you! To believe that you just happened to exist is absurd. The theory of evolution is an unproven fantasy. Every cell in your body reveals the wisdom and the intelligence of God. Talk to any microbiologist about the complexity and the incredible resourcefulness of the human cell and know that David was right! He said, “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:13-14).

Prepare your heart, and do it by repentance. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change in behavior. We have to decide whether we will live godly lives or ungodly lives. A godly person is one who takes God and His Word seriously. He turns away from sin and turns to righteousness because he loves the Lord. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” A godly person mourns his old sinful ways and he delights in doing what is right. God said, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

You prepare your heart by having the love of God. Nothing will cause you to love God more

than gratitude. You can't remember the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross, shedding His blood, and not be grateful that He was willing to sacrifice Himself. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This love for Jesus prepares us for the cross that we must bear and the sacrifices we must make. We do so joyfully, knowing that our love and sacrifices please Him.

We don't want a hard heart, we don't want a rocky heart, or a heart choked with worries and pleasures. We want a good and honest heart. We want the seed of God's Word to be planted in our hearts, and we want it to bear fruit. Jesus explains, "Now the parable is this: that the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; but these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and they bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:11-15).

In this parable, the seed is the gospel, and the different kind of soil describes how people receive the gospel. Some have hardened hearts that never let the seed in to germinate. The devil comes along and steals the seed, so the person never believes or is saved. Some hearts are like the rocky soil that doesn't allow the roots to go deep enough to keep the plant alive. These hearts leave the Lord when times get rough. The third kind of heart is like a plant in the middle of a bunch of weeds that choke out the water and nutrients. They cannot produce fruit because they have their hearts set on worries, and riches, and pleasures. They have no room for God in their hearts.

But an honest and good heart is different from the others. It takes in God's Word deeply and holds it fast. It doesn't let the rocks or the weeds keep it from growing and producing the fruit intended. That heart glorifies Jesus and honors the Father. It lovingly obeys the Lord and blesses others. A good heart knows how to love, how to be kind, how to forgive, how to help, and how to encourage. A good heart has hope, joy, patience, and inner peace.

A person who has a good heart given to the Lord is indeed blessed. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount describes three important characteristics of the blessed person that is associated with the heart. First, He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The idea of being "poor in spirit" means that I am destitute spiritually on my own. I know that I need the Lord; I cannot save myself by my own strength. The blessed man knows that apart from Christ he can do nothing (John 15:5).

Second, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). The prepared heart knows that it must get right and stay right with God. We must have the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin; we don't want to face the Lord without hope. We desperately hunger and thirst for righteousness; and we must have it to live.

Third, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). The pure in heart are not double-minded; they are free from guilt and sin. They've made the decision to "flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). They hunger for purity and they pursue it. They will do their best to be pure in heart and mind and body. Oh, do you have a heart that is poor in spirit, that hungers for righteousness and is pure?

A person with a prepared heart is not afraid to sacrifice. When it came time to build the tabernacle, the Lord God told Moses, “Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise a contribution” (Exodus 25:2). They brought their freewill offerings. In fact, they brought much more than was needed to build the tabernacle and were told to stop bringing any more.

The selfless Macedonians gave to the needy saints in Jerusalem, and while in a great ordeal of affliction and in deep poverty, they did it; and they did it with joy! Paul said they gave beyond their ability and begged for the favor of participating in support of the saints. He explained, “they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5). My friend, have you given yourself to the Lord?

A prepared heart gives of himself generously and cheerfully. Paul taught, “Now this I say, that he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). This is true of our money; it's true of our time; and our labors. Give of yourself to God. First John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.”

Why does this matter? How we give of ourselves to God affects how God will treat us in the judgment. We should all seek God's favor and love. Take notice of David's advice, “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Are you seeking the Lord? Let's pray. O Father, help each of us to seek You, to always want to serve You and to love You, and to be the kind of people that You are happy to know. Father, we pray that Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

God said, “‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore, repent and live’” (Ezekiel 18:30-32). Repentance turns the heart away from the ways of sin to the ways of God. Repentance gives us a new heart, new values, and new priorities.

We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day to be judged for what we have done, good or bad. God doesn't want to condemn us; He wants to save us. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Love, faith, and repentance prepare our hearts for obedience. When we obey from the heart we leave an old way of life and begin a new one. Romans 6:17-18 says, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, you become the slaves of righteousness.”

We obey when we're baptized into Christ. In baptism, God unites us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to Romans 6:3-7 and Colossians 2:12-13. It's the blood of Christ that washes away our sins when we're baptized into His death. So, prepare your heart to obey the Lord. Don't wait another day to obey Him.

## The Sanctity of Life

Life is the gift of God; and because God gives it, life is precious! Today, we're going to explore the sanctity of life! James 1:17 says that God is the giver of every good thing and every perfect thing given. I'm grateful for the written Word that teaches us about all that God has done for us. His Word teaches us, protects us from evil, and guides us to eternal life. Oh, what a blessing!

In 1970, a Texas woman became pregnant and decided to fight the antiabortion legislation of her state. Using the pseudonym Jane Roe, she took Henry Wade, the Dallas District Attorney, to court. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court in January, 1973, and is now known as Roe vs. Wade. The Supreme Court ruled 7 to 2 that the Texas law banning abortion was unconstitutional. Its judgment inhibited all regulation of abortion during the first three months of pregnancy; and during the second and third trimesters, it regulated it only in relation to the mother's physical or mental health. This ruling implicitly permitted abortion on demand at every stage of pregnancy. In 2014, the latest year for these statistics, 954,000 babies were aborted. That's 2,614 per day, 109 per hour, and three since I began speaking.

So, dealing with an unwanted pregnancy is tough; it's indeed complex; it's emotional. It has physical, social, medical, psychological, and spiritual considerations. Sadly, many have chosen to end the pregnancy by removing the life within. They appeal to national law and to changes in culture, but we know there is a higher law and a greater power to which we must all give an account. So, we ask, "What principles can we find in the Bible? And what does God say about life in the womb?"

Our reading today is from a Psalm of David, Psalm 139:13-16. "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them." That's a great statement of God's relationship to us when we were beginning life itself. Let's pray. Father, we're so thankful that from the very beginning of our existence You have formed us and made us and wove us together. Father, help us to love You and to serve You always. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

In the beginning, God made man in His own image and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God said, "'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground' So God created man in his own image, and in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). We should note that of all His creatures God regarded only man as made in His own image.

For this reason God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). God has a very high view of life and forbids the taking of human life because of our relationship to God. Psalm 8 reminds us that God is "mindful of man." Every person, male or female, young or old, handicapped or whole, mentally challenged or not, diseased or not, has a valued life. In fact, Acts 17:28 says "we are His offspring." Luke 3:38 calls Adam the "son of God." Hebrews 12:9 helps us to understand our relationship with God. It says, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we

respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" Yes, God is our heavenly Father.

The Scriptures also record how God loves and cares for little children. Abortion proponents argue that the taking of a preborn child's life is not wrong since the unborn do not measure up to the definition of a viable person. A person to them is "one who has good mental and physical health and the ability to socialize." In their minds, the fetus would not measure up. The Scriptures, however, view infants and children as a blessing from God. Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward." God provided laws to protect unborn children. In Exodus 21:22-25 God penalizes those who would cause a miscarriage. The life of the unborn would call for the life of one who caused the miscarriage.

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to refer to the unborn in Exodus is *yeled*, a word that "generally indicates young children, but may refer to teens or even young adults." The Hebrews did not have a need of a separate word for unborn children. They were just like any other children, only younger. In the Bible, there are references to born children and unborn children, but there is no such thing as a potential, incipient, or "almost" child.

Jesus loved little children and blessed them. In Luke 18:15-16 the Bible says, "And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Jesus spoke of these little ones as persons belonging to the kingdom of God. The Greek New Testament uses the word "brephos" to describe these little children. It's significant that the New Testament uses the same word to describe an unborn child as is used to describe a little child, the word "brephos." This word is used to speak of John the Baptist who leaped in his mother's womb in Luke 1:41 and also verse 44. This word "brephos" is used to speak of Jesus as a newborn baby in Luke 2:12, also in verse 16. We speak of a woman having a baby before birth and a baby after birth. The Scriptures use the same words in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe the unborn and a baby who has been born.

The Scriptures also speak of God's role in what takes place in the womb, in Psalm 22:9-10 David says, "Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb." Samson told Delilah in Judges 16:17, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man." God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul proclaimed that God "set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace" (Galatians 1:15). The Father of spirits has taken life in the womb seriously, and so should we.

David described God's work in the womb in Psalm 139:13-16, as we read a moment ago: he said, "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days that were ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." We should never think that God somehow doesn't know what the unborn are or what they are to become.



To take a life is to rob a person of its existence on earth; abortion ends the life that already is and robs the life that is to be. When people decide for others who lives and who dies, they presume the place of God. Women make most abortion decisions during a very difficult time in their lives, but no one knows what the future will hold. Who knows what some child will become? We must not presume that we know. The Scriptures speak of some ill-timed pregnancies. For instance, both Sarah and Elizabeth were too old to have children without God's help. If they had not had children, where would Isaac and John the Baptist be? If Jesse and his wife had thought seven sons were enough, there would have been no David. If Deborah or Esther's parents had wanted boys and aborted them because they were girls, where would Israel be?

There have been 58 million, 586 thousand, 256 abortions since 1973! Were all those aborted babies unworthy of life? Were there no scholars, no musicians, no scientists, no authors, no preachers, no leaders, and no doctors among them? Where would you be if your parents had some reason to abort you?

Abortion interferes with God's work in the making of a person. A fetus in a woman's body is not just tissue, not mere tissue, or only the product of conception. Nobody mourns the loss of tonsils, or an appendix, or a gall bladder. We may not like the pain or the bills from those surgeries, but we don't need comfort and we don't grieve over the loss of tonsils. But, when a woman has a miscarriage, we mourn for her loss and we mourn for the unborn child. More than one in my own family has lost a child due to a miscarriage or to a death shortly after birth. If this loss isn't a person, why would we mourn?

By the time a mother knows that she's pregnant, an unborn baby has its own circulatory and nervous systems. Blood cells, kidney cells, and nerve cells are developing already. By eight weeks, eyes and ears begin to form. Arms and legs are beginning to grow. The heart is beating, and the blood regularly streams through the main vessels. The brain continues to grow, and the lungs start to form. The baby is not some useless organ; this is the beginning of a unique person.

Sometimes I hear mothers say, "Well, it's my body, and I can do with it what I want to." Technically speaking, the tissue of a fetus differs from the mother's tissue, even though it's in her body. Genetically speaking, the baby and the mother are clearly not identical in their DNA. Consider also that a mother is always female. She is certainly different both biologically and genetically should the baby be a male. Milk is the product of a mother, but a fetus is the product of both the mother and of the father; a product of his body resides in her body that creates a new person. That's why we have paternity lawsuits. The new baby is the result of the union of two people. So, women do not produce babies alone.

When someone won't admit that abortion is wrong, she may say, "Well, you can't legislate morality." I like how Martin Luther King responded to this charge against legislating morals. He said, "We hear the familiar cry that morals can't be legislated. This may be true, but behavior can be regulated. The law may not be able to make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me." We need to remember that man's legislation does not change God's morals.

Many women think aborting a baby will be the answer to their problems, only to realize that abortion opens up a whole new stack of issues and problems. Having an abortion can burden a person for life. One lady wrote in 1994, "Women undergoing abortion have no idea what suffering they will encounter after the abortion, and daily for the rest of their lives, and when it suddenly dawns on them that they chose to extinguish a precious life. Twenty-three years ago, as a frightened young girl, alone, seeing no way out; I opted for a legal abortion that left me

infertile to suffer an eternal hell on earth, constantly aching for a child of my own to nurture. Taking the life of an unborn child eats away at your soul continually, like a ravenous cancer, causing one to pray for a quick demise. You will always wonder if the fetus was male or female, what he or she would look like. Yearly, you will mournfully recall the day your baby was taken from your body. Oh, if only one had mentioned adoption to me as a viable alternative to a temporary condition, my child would be alive today, perhaps making a difference in someone's life."

According to a study published in 2011 by Britain's Royal College of Psychiatrists, women who have abortions are 81 percent more likely to experience subsequent mental health problems. The greatest increases were seen in relation to suicidal behaviors and substance abuse. Their results came from 22 studies of nearly 900,000 women from six countries over a twelve-year period. They found that women who delivered an unplanned pregnancy were significantly less likely to have mental health problems than similar women who aborted unplanned pregnancies. Women with a history of abortion were 55 percent more likely to have mental health problems than women who gave birth.

God desires that every unmarried young man and young woman remain sexually pure. A sexually pure person doesn't have to face the challenge of an unwanted pregnancy. If you find yourself with an unwanted pregnancy, my heart goes out to you. I pray that you'll not choose an abortion as a way out. As a parent of four and the grandparent of twelve, I know the sacrifices and the challenges of bringing children into this world. If you're unable or unwilling to rear a child, others will gladly adopt that child and can provide what's needed. Oh, choose life; give your child an opportunity to learn about God and to love; and allow some Christian family to make a home for your child. You'll never regret doing the right thing. Let's pray together. Father, help us to love You, and help us to love each child. Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

As a minister, I've counseled women who gave in to the temptation to abort their child as a quick solution to a difficult circumstance. Once they realize what they have done, some think that they cannot find forgiveness. Listen to me. Yes, what you did was wrong. You can't change the past, but there is still hope. Christ sacrificed His life on the cross for you to give us hope. His blood is powerful enough to cleanse the worst of sins. If Jesus could forgive that worst of sinners, Saul of Tarsus, He can forgive you.

Paul wrote, "It's a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Oh, God's grace is greater than our sins. His blood can wash us clean! We can't change the past, but God can forgive us and no longer hold us accountable for our sins.

So, put your trust in Christ! Repent and turn away from that old sin and focus on serving the Lord. When we humble ourselves and we come lovingly and penitently to the Lord, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and we're baptized, God washes away our sins in baptism with the blood of Jesus. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). By being born of water and the spirit, you can be born again! The old person of sin will have died; it was crucified with Christ and you are free from sin. That takes place in baptism (Romans 6:3-7). God can forgive you!

## Christian Morality

A recent Gallup poll found three-fourths of Americans saying that moral values in the United States are getting worse. We're going to explore the causes of America's moral decline and the solution.

For several years the moral standards and values of our culture have been declining. It seems the whole moral world has just turned upside down. Some in our culture have worked hard to silence religious values so that Christians feel pressured not to speak out about sin. What a shame! What confusion! National laws have changed how some look at the sanctity of life and marriage, so that we no longer have freedom of conscience to oppose sin without being labeled or punished for it. Others have made it their life goal to silence the Bible on any moral issue. This isn't new; people have never wanted to hear what they do is wrong. They would rather excuse sin than repent of it.

When people said the moral values of America are declining, the Gallup researchers asked them why. People offered several reasons: lack of respect, poor parenting, scandals, increased crime and violence, the breakdown of the typical two-parent home. All of these certainly contribute to declining moral values, but many of them are symptoms of the problem and not the root cause.

Our moral confusion comes from the fact that many Americans no longer give God the fear and the respect that He deserves. They no longer take Him seriously. Some in our culture have told God to just be quiet and to leave us alone. The worst thing that we can do is to abandon God and His ways. Choices have consequences. The consequences of abandoning God are revealing themselves in our land. We have sown to the wind and reaped a whirlwind.

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to Titus 3:3-7. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." That's God's wonderful statement of God's salvation. In the 1800s millions of children in America learned to read from a McGuffey's Eclectic Reader. In the 1836 edition, the author published this paragraph that seems prophetic:

"If you can induce a community to doubt the genuineness and the authenticity of the Scriptures; to question the reality and obligations of religion; to hesitate, un-deciding, whether there be any such thing as virtue or vice; whether there be an eternal state of retribution beyond the grave; or whether there exists any such being as God, well you've broken down the barriers of moral virtue and you've hoisted the flood gates of immorality and crime. . . . Every bond that holds society together would be ruptured; fraud and treachery would take the place of confidence between man and man; the tribunals would be scenes of bribery and injustice; avarice, perjury, ambition and revenge would walk through the land and render it more like the dwelling of savage beasts than the tranquil abode of civilized and Christianized men."

The National Cultural Values survey found America is losing its fear of God. According to the survey, 87 percent of Americans say they believe in God; and 52 percent say they believe the Bible is God's authoritative word. Yet only 36 percent believe people should live by God's

principles; only 15 percent say that they will live by their own principles even if they conflict with God's principles; and 45 percent prefer to combine God's teachings with their own values. They've replaced the God of Heaven with their own thinking.

Many people live not in immorality, but in amorality. One is "amoral" when he doesn't care about right and wrong or morality. Amoral people never feel accountable to God. Many today don't know the God of the Bible, so they make up a god after their own desires. They imagine what they want God to be like. When they find the God of the Bible doesn't match their imagined ideas, they exchange the God of Heaven for the god that's in their own imagination. But we can never replace the God of Heaven with a dreamed-up god.

The god people create in their minds is only an imaginary god. He doesn't require anything of them morally or spiritually, so they're happy with this god. But the God of the Bible, the true God of Heaven, is not like man-made gods. He is entirely holy; He is absolutely righteous; and He is totally moral. He doesn't tolerate or approve sin. He doesn't overlook or excuse some sins, while punishing others.

The Bible says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:14-19).

A famous preacher today says that Jesus never referred to anyone as a sinner, but that preacher needs to read the New Testament more closely. At various times, Jesus publicly denounced sinners as snakes, dogs, foxes, hypocrites, corrupted tombs, and unwashed dishes. Jesus didn't want His hearers to miss the point. God condemns sin, but Jesus doesn't leave us the way that He finds us. Jesus didn't save us so that we could keep on practicing sin. He graciously wants to wash the sins away from our souls; He also wants to transform our lives.

The God of love forgives and wants us to overcome our sins; He blesses the repentant who change their hearts and lives. Repentant people grieve over their sins, forsake them, and then they begin living righteously for God. They don't want to repeat the evil that they've done. After David sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba and killing her husband, Uriah, he sought forgiveness. He wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and He saves the crushed in spirit."

People rarely mourn over their sins anymore. Instead, they excuse them or justify them. They love to blame somebody else or even blame God for their sins. When have you, friend, been broken-hearted and contrite over your personal sins, the things that you've done that are wrong? When have you taken responsibility for your sins? When have you, friend, confessed your sins and your sorrow for having committed those sins; then that's a part of repentance.

The apostle Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for ignoring sin and for their arrogant attitude about sin. God's Word says, "It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul rebuked them, that church at Corinth, for

tolerating the sin instead of taking action against the man who committed it.

The inspired apostle then does take action. He writes in verses 3 to 5, "For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you're to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Many are shocked to hear such language coming from the Bible, because they think Christ never judges sin; oh, yes He does! Jesus called for people to repent so they wouldn't be lost. The Lord Jesus said, "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). The Lord Jesus will not continue to extend His grace to those who refuse to repent.

Many people presume upon the patience and the grace of God. They honestly believe that God would never condemn anybody, but God's grace and forgiveness have limits. The Bible says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). You cannot live a sinful lifestyle and expect to go to heaven. God is serious about sin.

The Bible warns, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Now anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:26-31).

Christ is not content to leave us where He found us. The Lord Jesus takes a man where He finds him and helps him to become what he wants him to be. A Christian is a person that Christ has transformed. He takes us out of sin, and He puts us into a life that is clean and righteous. He wants to transform your life, but Christ cannot help us out of sin if we are unwilling to see the sin that's in our lives. We don't have to keep on living in sin. We can forsake our sins.

As we read a moment ago, Titus 3:3-7 says, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Christians don't see themselves as better than others. The Christians that I know realize that they were once lost in sin but saved by the grace of God. They live grateful lives for what God has done for them. We are all strugglers in this life to become the kind of person that glorifies the Lord Jesus. My favorite saying is, "I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I'm going to be; but thank God that by His grace I'm not what I used to be."

A person who loves God will not be content to keep on committing sin. The Bible says, "See

what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it didn't know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears that we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

Love and faith lead a Christian to please the Lord in every respect. Christians who love the Lord are not content to lead their old lives. They want to grow in their faith, their holiness, and their love for God and man. Paul told the young preacher Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

Some preachers will not speak against sin. They do a great disservice! When Christians fail to speak against sin or they fail to set an example of holiness, they confuse the younger generation. It's no surprise that many young adults see no sin in sex outside of marriage, or having a baby out of wedlock. This is no small matter! Not only is fornication immoral, it's also a major cause of children growing up in single-parent homes and in poverty.

Someone says, "Well, Phil, you're being awfully hard on people." No, I'm not being hard. I'm being honest and loving. A cruel person would never tell you sin is wrong or ask you to repent. A cruel person would laugh at sin and tell you to just forget it. That may seem kind or tolerant, until we realize this: God does not forget about unresolved sin, He punishes it. Friend, God still says "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Our tolerant culture may overlook your sins, but God will not overlook unresolved sin. God instead wants you to repent; He wants to cleanse you of your sin by the blood of Jesus. He loves you and He sent His Son, Jesus, to the cross to forgive you. Why not come to Him for cleansing?

"The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop at late or early hour. To lose one's wealth is sad indeed. To lose one's health is more. To lose one's soul is such a loss that no man can restore." Somewhere in the world, thirty people died while I was reading that short poem. One hundred twenty people die every minute. Their spirits return to God to be judged for the lives that they've lived.

The Lord Jesus said, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "If your right hand makes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus isn't interested in our being blind; what He wants us to do is to repent.

You might ignore the sin in your life today, but you cannot ignore it forever. God expects you to turn your life around and to put your trust in Christ Jesus. When you believe with all your heart, repent of your sins, confess the name of Jesus Christ before others, and are baptized, you'll find God's grace and forgiveness. At the time of baptism, God washes away all our sins (Acts 22:16), and He does it through the blood of Jesus Christ. He adds us to His church; He makes us His child. Baptism is an immersion in water for a penitent person who professes his faith.

That's why we should come to Christ in true repentance and be baptized, just as Peter taught in Acts 2:38. If you're a Christian, maybe you've fallen away, and you need to come back to the Lord. Today, is the day to do it. There's no better time!