

Program Transcripts

For May 2017



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

May 2017

Topics subject to change without notice

MAY 7 – CHRISTIAN VALUES

What do Christians value? What is important to them? In this lesson we will explore how faithful Christians think and what they hold dear. By understanding values, we can better understand what it means to follow Christ.

MAY 14 – IN CHRIST

It most certainly matters whether we are “in” Christ or “out” of Christ. One who is in Christ will enjoy His fellowship and His blessing for an eternity, but those who are outside of Christ are excluded from the promises of Christ.

MAY 21 – CONSIDER

Can you consider for a moment the possibility someone has told you something false? Fake news and half-truths are everywhere, and many do not know what to believe. Thankfully, God gave us an incorruptible and eternal standard of truth.

MAY 28 – JESUS AND HIS PROMISES

A promise is only as good as the one who made it and his ability to stand behind it. God never lies and can do all things. When God makes a promise, you can depend upon Him to keep it. God keeps His promises.

Christian Values

You can tell a lot about people by looking at their values. Today, we're going to explore Christian values and what they mean. The Lord Jesus promised, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Nearly 2000 years have passed since the first book of the New Testament was written, and today we have billions of copies. The New Testament has been translated into more than 500 languages, and parts of the New Testament into more than 2000. Though governments have tried to destroy every copy of the Bible they could find, the Word of God continues to be the most treasured book of all time.

People often talk about family values or moral values, but they sometimes assume everyone shares their values. The word "values" can mean many different things; and this word is often overused and sometimes confusing. Not everyone thinks alike or shares the same moral and spiritual beliefs. Our culture loves to redefine words and make them mean things they never meant before. You may speak of a value and mean one thing, while your neighbor's values are entirely different.

Because we love the Lord, we learn to give value to the things that God values. God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. God said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are 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). The things that people think are so important may not be important to God. We may invest our whole lives in things that will not matter. How sad it would be to live a life that fails to lead to heaven!

Our reading today comes from the Words of Jesus Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:19-24. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Today, we're talking about Christian values, and what matters to Christians? What do they hold sacred? The Lord Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Our values capture our hearts and set the path for our lives. We cling to the things that we love; we nourish and protect them. So, let's consider the things that really matter to Christians who love God.

First, they value God and His Word. Strong Christians trust God and believe what God says. They enthusiastically teach their children about the deity of Christ, about the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, and about the resurrection. They don't apologize for taking the Word of God seriously when it speaks about sin and the judgment.

Strong Christians take God's grace and His promises seriously. They realize that apart from the grace of God, they would have no blessing, no salvation, and no hope of heaven. They point to Ephesians 2:8-9 that says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." They realize that God saves us, and we cannot save ourselves by earning our way to heaven. They also apply God's plan of salvation rather than argue with God over what He asks of them.

If you ask me why I am a Christian, I would point first to the cross of Christ. Jesus loves me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so. I tell you no one ever loved me like Jesus. He suffered great pain and humiliation; He shed His blood to wash away my sins and save me. Because of the love and the grace of God, I'm willing to devote my life to Christ. I pray that you are, too!

Christians also realize that God will, day to day, give them what they ask, help them find what they seek, and open the door when they knock (Matthew 7:7-8). They "know" God causes all things to work together for good when they encounter rough days (Romans 8:28). They cast their cares on God because they know that He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7).

Second, they value truth. The early church devoted itself to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42); and faithful Christians today will do the same thing. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding." Strong Christians realize the necessity of standing strong in the truth. Paul knew the day would come when men with itching ears "will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

The Lord Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). To stay in God's Word means we'll be true disciples and know the truth. We have no desire to depart from the Scriptures into human traditions or self-made religion. We want the truth!

Third, they value the church. If the church were not important, Jesus would not have purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Because the church was so important to Jesus, it should be important to us. Christians who love the Lord support the church with their presence, their money, and their energy. They're interested in the church growing, and so they tell everyone they know about the Lord Jesus and His love. They point to the cross and to the resurrection. They want everyone to have the hope that they enjoy. They consider being a member of the church, that is the body of Christ, as the greatest privilege of life. They see the church as the very family of God. Christians are brothers and sisters with God as their Father and Jesus as their Lord.

The Scripture exhorts us to "love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17). Congregations that plant other congregations in nearby areas produce fruit for generations. The churches of Macedonia and Achaia helped the needy saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Christians love one another and support each other throughout the world.

Fourth, they value souls. Every person has a soul, and that soul will spend eternity either with God or without Him. God loves every person, and so do we. Because every soul will spend eternity in heaven with God or in hell without God, you and I both will all spend it somewhere. So, Christians take souls seriously. Nothing is more important than having a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 2:3-4 Paul says, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God wants you to be saved, and so do we.

Words like "lost" and "saved" seem strange to many people. Sadly, many people don't know their souls are lost and need to be saved. To be lost means that they'll spend eternity without God. People are lost because they've sinned. Sin takes place when someone breaks God's laws or fails to keep what God wants them to do. First John 3:4 simply says, "sin is lawlessness." When a person ignores God's laws and goes outside of them, he becomes lawless. James 4:17 says, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." When people

sin they break God's law, and also God's heart. God is gracious and doesn't want anyone to be lost.

People speak about big sins and little ones, but in God's eyes all sins matter. Every sin is offensive to God. God is utterly holy and cannot approve of sin, any sin. God said, "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Again, Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This death is not physical, but spiritual. Death is a separation. Physically, death is the separation of the body and the spirit. Spiritually speaking, death is the separation of man from God. Sinners are no longer in fellowship with God. The prophet Isaiah said, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). Spiritually, dead people stand outside the grace and favor of God.

Christians talk to the lost about their souls because they love them. They teach people the good news, the gospel, about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because they love them. They challenge them to believe and obey the Lord. They ask them to give up their sins and to turn to the Lord. Evangelism is both confrontational and persuasive. Christians speak out about sin because they know the consequences of sin. Christians try to persuade people to forsake their sins and to come to the Lord because they value their souls. Christians aren't your enemy because they ask you to repent of sin. They teach you the gospel because the gospel opens the door to your salvation from the consequences of sin. Someone who teaches you the gospel of Christ is your friend!

Fifth, they value righteousness. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). Oh, how I wish people today not only knew what righteousness is, but also would practice it! Faithful Christians understand that God Himself, not culture, ultimately defines righteousness, holiness, and morality. Christians recognize that they are accountable to God, not man, for their eternal destiny. They realize that God has the last word in all matters, and that no one can silence, change, or overrule His voice. You can disagree with God; you can propose a new theory about things; you can even act as if God does not exist; but in the end, God will have the last say.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." If you wish to see the Lord, you must turn from sin to live a holy life. First Peter 1:14-16 says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" The world has always been, well..., "worldly." It's always followed its own desires.

Paul explained, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that's not the way that you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:17-24). Because Christians value holiness and the world doesn't, we must be lights in a dark world, hoping to lead everyone to Christ.

Sixth, they value serving others. Paul said, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Christians view serving others as if they were serving the Lord Jesus personally. Jesus said this about inviting in the stranger, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

Serving others builds character in the servant and produces thanksgiving in those who they serve. While no one wishes for disasters like a tornado, a fire, or an earthquake, such events provide outstanding opportunities for Christian service and compassion to those in need. They open doors that might not open otherwise.

When hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the Gulf Coast, churches of Christ in many states responded quickly to the needs of the people. Congregations not only sent financial aid but also thousands of workers into the devastated region. In the wake of the disaster, workers planted five new congregations. These Christian servants not only blessed a devastated region, they also built up their home congregations as well.

Last, they value their relationships with other people. They value their homes and families. The greatest wish of any Christian is for God's blessing to come upon all the people they love. They take seriously the command to love one another. The Lord Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Because Jesus loves us, we learn how to love one another and even love our enemies. Wouldn't you like to have Christian values in your life?

Do you love the Lord and value Jesus? Do you value what He did on the cross, His grace, and His teaching? Do you value Him enough to give yourself to Him fully and freely for the rest of your life? We must be God's people, doing God's work God's way, so that we may one day live with Him in glory. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). I think of the old song, "He is my everything; He is my all," and that's the way it should be. I don't want to spend one day without Christ as the center of my heart and life. Loving Jesus means listening to Him and obeying Him. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). If you want to live with God in the next life, you must be willing to serve God in this life.

To become a Christian, believe in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Repent of your sins! Turn from them and turn to the Lord in love and devotion. Confess your faith in Jesus and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Colossians 2:12-13 says, "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." In baptism, we are buried and raised with Christ through faith in God's power. When we are baptized, God forgives us of all our sins. I hope you won't wait another day to enjoy God's grace and forgiveness. Oh, become a Christian today!

In Christ

Many people talk about being “all in.” Are you “all in” with Christ? Today, we’re going to examine what it means to be “in” Christ. Because God has spoken in Scripture, we can know what is true. There are so many voices in this world, and not all voices tell the truth. If you want to know the truth about spiritual matters, go to the Word of God. God will never lie to you; He’ll never lead you astray; and He’ll never take back what He’s spoken; He’ll always keep His promises. You can trust God to tell you truth in His Word. So read your Bible, study it, memorize it, and take it to heart. You’ll never regret doing the right thing.

There is a great gulf between being “in” Christ and “out” of Christ. That difference will affect every aspect of our lives on earth and determine our eternal destiny. The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus is the only door to the Father; there is no other. The apostle Peter said about Jesus to the Jewish leaders, “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” (Acts 4:12). We must go to Jesus if we want the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven.

The apostle Paul said, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:28-29). We could certainly say the same. That’s why this program exists. We want you to be mature in Christ and to live with Him forever.

Our reading today comes from Luke 13:24-29. “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’; and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.”

Of all the blessings I’ve ever received, nothing compares with the joy, the peace, the hope, and the love found in being in Christ Jesus, my Lord. Being in Christ means more to me than anything else. I wouldn’t want one day, one hour, one minute, or even one second to pass outside of Christ. I want to belong to Him, and I want Him one day to say to me, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

There are many blessings that belong to the one who is in Christ. Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” We have every spiritual blessing in Christ we could imagine. I think of the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Each of these things is a blessing in life. We find them in an abundant life in Christ, free from misery. If we don’t have it; oh, how

miserable we are. Can you imagine how sad our lives would be without love, without joy, without peace, without patience, without kindness, without goodness, without faithfulness, without gentleness, or without self-control?

In Christ, we can find the best of life! Even while Paul was in prison, he found reasons to rejoice in the Lord! In Christ, we find the secret of contentment. Philippians 4:8-9 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

In Christ, we have a sure hope and a sure promise. Paul said, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That's why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Corinthians 1:19-20). God doesn't tease or take back what He promises. You can count on God to keep His Word!

In Christ, you can count on God to love you. Even in the hardest of times; in Christ, we never leave the love of God. The early church went through terrible persecution, and many lost their lives. Paul asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39). God's love does not change regardless of what happens to us on earth. In Christ, we have God's love ever with us.

In Christ, we have God's forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." We should never think of our forgiveness as cheap. It cost God His Son Jesus; and it cost Jesus a painful death on the cross. Jesus shed His blood for our sins so that we could be forgiven. Paul reminds us of what we were before Christ and what we are in Christ in the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. Paul told the Gentiles, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13). Because of the cross, we could be free from sin. Because of the cross, we can come close to God. Ephesians 2:19 describes what forgiveness through the blood of Christ does. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are now fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Paul explains, "For our sake he made Him" (that is Christ), "to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him" (that is, in Christ), "we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The blood of Jesus has delivered us and brought us into the kingdom of God. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." When we're in Christ, we're in the church, the kingdom of God. When we're in Christ, we're no

longer following darkness and sin, but we're following righteousness.

Sin brings spiritual death and separation from God, but Christ brings redemption and grace. Ephesians 2:4-7 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Being in Christ means I'm saved by grace; it means I'm raised up with Christ and I'll live with Him in heaven. In Christ, I'll enjoy all the immeasurable riches of God's grace and kindness in the ages to come! I tell you that promise alone makes me want to serve Christ all my life!

In Christ, God doesn't look at you like He once did. He doesn't see the old person who was lost in sin and had no hope. No, God now sees the new person who has been forgiven and transformed into the likeness of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, all things have become new." In Christ, I'm no longer what I used to be. God has caused me to be reborn with a new kind of life. Romans 6:4 says, "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." In Christ, we don't think or act as we did before that time when we became Christians.

In Christ, we have presented ourselves to the Lord as servants of righteousness. We have stopped the sin and started living holy and loving lives. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Instead of living selfish lives, we now give of ourselves to the service of God and to the blessing of others. We've been created in Christ for good works.

The apostle Paul explains, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:17-24).

As Christians we're not perfect, but as time passes we learn to put away the old sinful habits and to start new and godly habits. We've left the old ways to be like Christ. Ephesians 4:25-29 instructs us, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." The new man can no longer think, talk, or act like he once did. He is indeed a new creature!

The new Christian must also treat other people differently than he once did. He can no longer let his selfish pride get in the way of loving others. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Because God has forgiven us, Christians forgive one another, love their enemies, and show compassion. To practice forgiveness is no small matter in Christ. One of the real differences between Christianity and many other religions is the ability to forgive. The inability to forgive has caused multiple wars and acts of violence, even in today's world.

For this and many other reasons, Paul could say, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:7-9). Oh, this, my friend, is why being in Christ matters!

Are you in Christ, or on the outside? Will God's favor and love be yours because you belong to Him? The Lord Jesus said, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But He'll say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'" (Luke 13:24-27). Some will miss living with God forever, because they didn't believe in Christ, or they wouldn't repent of their sins, or they wouldn't obey God's instructions found in the Bible. My friend, don't be shut out; come to the Lord!

Even though the church in Laodicea was lukewarm and so distasteful that Jesus wanted to spit it out of His mouth, He still loved the people. He urged them to repent and said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Even when we shut God out, He's knocking on our door, wanting back in our lives, and wanting to have a right relationship with us. God wants us to be with Him forever.

May I ask, "Do you have a close, loving relationship with God? Are you right with God?" The only way to God is through Christ Jesus, our Lord. So if you wish to be right with God, you must be "in" Christ! You must be asking how can we get into Christ. The Scriptures, give us the answer. Some folks will tell you that we believe into Christ; and others will say we pray a little prayer into Christ; but the Bible doesn't teach these things.

God has told us how we get into Christ. Romans 6:3 says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We come into Christ when by faith and repentance we're baptized into Christ. We put on Christ and become God's child in baptism, and not before and not until!

Consider

Can you consider for a moment the possibility that someone has told you something that's false? We value the truth of God's Word! We want to measure all we believe and practice by the standard of the Scriptures. God's living Word is imperishable and will remain forever.

The Lord Jesus lived among people who were heavily burdened by the human traditions of the Pharisees. These traditions had numerous rules that you couldn't read in Scripture. The Pharisees claimed that these traditions came from Moses himself, and were part of an oral law that was passed down. Sadly, the people believed what they were told, even though the Lord, Himself, never taught these things. It was simply a tradition of men. People can repeat an appalling lie for so long that a populace will believe it. People can pass down ideas from one generation to the next until people never imagine that men produced it rather than God.

Jesus told these Jews who were caught up in human traditions, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. 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). We all can fall to the temptation of believing things that may not be true. This is why we must study the Word of God! "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). That's what we strive to do each week! We want to hear what God teaches; we want to believe it; and practice it.

Our reading today comes from the Words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. 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. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:13-20).

The crafty, old serpent, Satan, loves to plant doubts. He did it with Eve in the garden when he asked her the question, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5). With stealth and evil, Satan turned doubt into a lie. The woman believed the lie and ate of the fruit and even urged Adam to eat. Adam knew the truth, but gave way to the pressure of his wife.

First Kings 13 tells of a man of God who spoke out against Jeroboam and Israel. God told him that he was to neither eat bread nor drink water on his trip and that he was to return by a different way. There was an old prophet who deceived this man of God, telling him that God had spoken to him and he was to come to his house to eat and drink; but the old prophet lied to him. When the man of God listened to the lying prophet, he disobeyed God and was punished for it. We must be careful about what we hear. First Thessalonians 5:21-22 says, "but test

everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." What God says matters.

Jeremiah 23 tells of false prophets who claim to speak for God. Jeremiah 23:16 says, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.'" Then Jeremiah explains, "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds" (Jeremiah 23:21-22).

Does truth really matter? Yes! Jeremiah 23:32 says, "Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I didn't send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD." Believing a lie will not be of any value to you. It may soothe your conscience today, but it may condemn you tomorrow. You cannot bury the truth deep enough that it will not surface again!

The Lord Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). We need God's Word to live spiritually; we need to hear it, to believe it, to love it, to memorize it, and to practice it. Nothing else will assure us that we are truly right with God. Feelings will fade; human traditions will wilt; false gospels will fail; and false promises will fall short. The Lord Jesus said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). That's God speaking, not my opinion!

The New Testament lists several prophecies of men falling away from the truth and believing a lie. The Lord Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16). He explains in verses 21 to 23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works and we did that in your name?' I'll declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Lawlessness takes place when people go outside the Word of God and follow their own ways and their own desires. You cannot ignore the will of God and please Him at the same time.

The apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." He goes on to say, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:28-32). One of the strategies of the devil is to twist the truth just enough to deceive people. Of course, when people follow the devil, they leave the ways of God.

Paul also warned the young man Timothy about false teachers. Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences

are seared, men who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Some people have no conscience; they will deceive the unsuspecting; and they'll lead them into practices that God never commanded nor wanted.

Paul was concerned that the truth endure through the generations. So, he challenged Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:1-4). I'm amazed at how some have bought into religious and secular myths that have no foundation in Scripture.

Where in Scripture does it teach someone other than Jesus is head of the church? Where is sprinkling taught for baptism? Where is infant baptism ever mentioned? Where are the instruments of music in Christian worship? Where is evolution? Where is purgatory? Where do you read of lent? Where is Ash Wednesday? Where are women preachers or women bishops? Where are the prophecies of modern prophets? Where do you find salvation by faith alone or once saved, always saved? There are many other things just like this. If they are not in Scripture, they are humanly produced, and destined to be uprooted.

The apostle Peter said, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude verses 3 and 4). God gave us the faith only once, and He did it in the first century. He wants us to contend for our faith, and this is to show why what we believe is true and why what is false is wrong.

When Paul faced some Jewish Christians who were trying to bind the Law of Moses and circumcision on Gentile Christians, he 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 you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9). The truth matters! When people preach something other than what God teaches, they put their souls at peril.

The inspired apostle John faced opposition as well. He wrote, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what

we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works" (2 John 7-11). Abiding in God's Word, staying in the Word, keeps us right with God; but when we go beyond the Word, beyond the Bible—whether it's this specific teaching about Jesus coming in the flesh, or some other essential doctrine, we cease to have a relationship with God. Don't support something that's false.

No one likes to think he or she has been deceived, but the devil has been a deceiver and a pretender for a very long time. Paul faced some pretend apostles in his day, and there are pretenders today as well! He wrote, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). They'll be lost. If you wish to keep from being deceived, my friend, study, study, study the Scriptures, study thoroughly! The Scriptures are a light to our path to keep us from straying into error and falling for a counterfeit religion.

Why does this matter? When people stray from the truth, they want everyone to agree with them, and then they try to justify themselves. They'll teach others, who teach others. As time passes, later generations never even consider the possibility that they've followed someone into error. Lies that are passed down through the ages can be the most dangerous, because by this time the deceived will swear that they believe the truth. The devil laughs, because he's fooled them. He's hidden the truth and stolen their souls. When that happens, the Lord weeps. The Lord wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding." We want nothing less and nothing more. We must hold to the truth found in God's Word. We need to be like the Bereans! Acts 17:11 says, "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Have you checked what the Word of God says? Have you examined what you believe and practice? Have you compared those things to God's Word? You might be surprised at how different you are to the faith once delivered to the saints. Can you consider for a moment the possibility that you believe something false?

The Lord Jesus promised, "If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Don't settle for anything less or more than the truth. Don't ignore what God says and don't add to what God says. Simply believe and obey the Word of God!

To become a Christian you must believe and confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God. You must leave sinful ways and embrace the Lord's way. There is no salvation without repentance. When out of love you have repented and confessed, obey the Lord by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Peter told the guilt-stricken people at Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). When you're baptized, God washes away your sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, and He adds you to the church.

Jesus and His Promises

If I could stand on the highest hill and speak with the loudest voice, I would say, “God keeps His promises!” Today, we’re considering Jesus and His promises. A promise is only as good as the one who makes it and his ability to keep it.

We love it when someone keeps a promise; but we’re unhappy when someone breaks a promise. You’ve probably suffered the heartache of a broken promise, or you may have made a promise to someone and found that you couldn’t keep your word. Those things disappoint all of us. People may be well intentioned, but we’re all weak and forgetful. God, however, isn’t weak or forgetful; He keeps His promises.

God is faithful, loyal, and trustworthy. You can count on Him. Moses explained, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). Moses went through lots of struggles in His life, but He never gave up on God to keep His promises.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul faced afflictions, struggles, conflicts, and even death; but he said about God, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). He didn’t doubt, but he said, “But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him” (that is, Christ), “they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

Our reading today comes from words of Peter on the Day of Pentecost when he’s preaching to the Jews. He concludes his sermon by saying, “‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘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. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:36-41).

Joshua is one of my favorite characters in the Bible. The Scripture always speaks well of him, and he was a courageous and faithful leader in Israel. Joshua lived through the ten plagues; he crossed the Red Sea on dry ground; he led Israel into battle; he ascended Mount Sinai with Moses; he spied out the promised land and gave a good report with Caleb; he stood beside Moses in all the wanderings; and he led the people into the promised land. Yes, he crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. He fought until the Israelites had conquered all the land that was promised to Abraham.

When he was an old man, he called all Israel together, and he said, “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed” (Joshua 23:14). Here

is a man who saw God in action for many decades of his life, even when things seemed nearly impossible! Yet he never wavered in his faith that God would keep every promise!

We can trust God to keep His promises for many reasons. First, God is all powerful; and nothing is impossible for Him. God can easily do things that you and I cannot do. Job said, "I know that you" (speaking about God) "can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). Jeremiah 32:17 says, "'Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.'" I am reminded of Ephesians 3:20-21, which says "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Yes, God can and will keep His promises!

Second, God loves us and provides for us, His people. We only need to look at the cross to know how much the Lord loves us. First John 4:10 says, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation" (the atoning sacrifice) "for our sins." God sacrificed His Son—and I tell you that this is no small or easy gift. Paul explained, "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). God is not stingy with His love and care for you and me!

Third, He is the God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). The book of Hebrews describes the very character of God when He makes promises. "So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope that set before us" (Hebrews 6:17-18). God's character guarantees His oaths and promises. You can count on God!

So... let's think about some promises that we have in Christ. It matters greatly whether we're in Christ or out of Him. God's promises are for those who love Him and follow Him. First, Jesus promises those who love, believe, and obey Him to forgive their sins. Hebrews 8:12 says, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." Forgiveness is such a great blessing. Second Corinthians 5:19 says, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." When God forgives, He makes friends with us and no longer holds our sins against us.

When the guilty people at Pentecost asked what they needed to do, Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself" (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). The atoning blood of Jesus Christ will wash away our sins when we repent and are baptized. God promised it and God will do it! When we meet God's conditions, God keeps His promises.

A Christian will sometimes find himself still committing sins and still in need of forgiveness. First John 1:7 says to the Christian, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in

the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Cleansing comes to Christians who walk in the light. John continues, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). We must be honest with God about our sins and confess them. God then responds by cleansing us from all unrighteousness—every sin. Jesus also stands by Christians with the Father. Christ doesn’t want us to sin, but He knows our weaknesses. John wrote, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (somebody who will stand beside us) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). Oh, I’m thankful the Lord Jesus “always lives to make intercession” for me.

Fourth, Jesus promises that God will take care of us. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” If we’ll put God first, He’ll provide our needs. David wrote in Psalm 37:25, “I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread.” Paul said in Philippians 4:19, “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Hebrews 13:5 reminds us, “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’” God will take care of us.

Fifth, God promises to listen to our prayers. The Lord Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7-11). God knows what we need even before we ask. He will indeed answer our prayers!

Even in times of great stress and difficulty, we can call out to God. While he was bound with chains as a prisoner and in danger of death, Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7). When we call out to God, He hears us! He’ll set a guard around our hearts and minds to give us that peace that passes all understanding. Oh, that’s a powerful reason to rejoice!

Sixth, God’s love will never leave us. Romans 8:35-39 says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor

angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." No matter what has happened to you there's never been one moment when the Lord God didn't love you. We can say with Peter, cast "all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Seventh, Jesus will not give us more than we can bear. The Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). The Lord gives us a livable faith and a bearable burden! Christianity is not an impossible religion. You can live the Christian life and you can go to heaven! Some people imagine God has no interest in saving them, but that's simply not true. God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4). God takes no delight in people losing their souls.

Last, Jesus has prepared a place for you. Jesus knew that when He died He would go to be with the Father who sent Him, according to John 7:33 and chapter 16:10. He promised, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). We have hope of eternal life and of living with God in heaven forever.

Ephesians 2:4-7 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." God wants to save you and bring you home to heaven so He might bless you for all eternity. This is our hope! What a marvelous promise!

The question for many of us is not whether God is faithful to us but whether we're going to be faithful and obedient to Him. Many who start out strong in faith and attend church regularly grow weary and fall away. They stop reading the Bible, praying, attending worship, giving to God, being kind to others, and avoiding sin. They meant to do right but drifted away from God. Hebrews 2:1-3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" My friend, are you right with God?

God will forgive and redeem you only after you first place your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God; second, repent of your sins and follow the Lord; third, confess your faith; and fourth, be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Being baptized into Christ takes place when we're immersed in water, and that means we're baptized into His death, and His blood washes us clean from sin and gives us newness of life.