

Program Transcripts

For September 2014



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY [®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

September 2014

Topics subject to change without notice

SEPTEMBER 7 – CALLED BY THE GOSPEL

The Scriptures teach that we are called by the gospel of Christ. Your greatest hope, your greatest blessing, and your opportunity for eternal life comes in the gospel. The gospel is good news we should hear and obey.

SEPTEMBER 14 – THY WILL BE DONE

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray “Thy will be done on the earth as it is in heaven.” If the will of God was done on earth as it is in heaven, what would happen? How would our lives be different if we practice the will of God?

SEPTEMBER 21 – GOD’S WAYS

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and God’s ways are not our ways. Many assume the God of the Bible thinks the way they think and does things the way they do them. What is the God of the Bible really like?

SEPTEMBER 28 – KEEPING MY ZEAL

Some people live their Christian life to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some are passionate about their faith, while others are apathetic. How can we keep our passion and zeal for God alive?

Called by the Gospel

After 34 years, we still proclaim the message of hope and salvation. Today we're exploring what it means to be called by the gospel. The Scriptures contain the words of eternal life. They teach us how to draw close to God and find the salvation that He offers. We need His grace, and the Bible teaches us how to receive His grace.

This television ministry began on the first Lord's Day of September, 1980, with Mack Lyon preaching the gospel; and today marks the beginning of our 35th year. For 34 years this program, which began on one station in Ada, Oklahoma, broadcasts the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Today we broadcast on WGN America throughout the United States; we're also on 206 broadcast television stations; we're on 150 cable systems; and we're on more than fifty radio stations across the country. We're grateful to churches of Christ and faithful Christians all over the country who have supported this ministry and made it possible. We're also grateful for your prayers and encouragement. We hope to serve the Lord and you for many years to come.

Our task in this program is to preach the gospel, the good news of Christ, and that's man's hope. We echo the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:14-16, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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." Your greatest hope, your greatest blessing, and your opportunity for eternal life comes in the gospel. So, hear the gospel and obey it.

Our reading comes from 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

The Lord Jesus came into this world to save souls. The angel Gabriel told Joseph, "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1: 21). When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to his disciples, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). As we read through the gospels Jesus willingly died on the cross for our sins. First Peter 2:24 says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Jesus not only saved us from sin, He pointed us to a higher and nobler life. He wanted to heal a sin-sick world.

Mark 2:15-17 says, "And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, 'Why is He eating and

drinking with tax collectors and sinners?’ And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It’s not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” Jesus has always cared for every soul, and especially those who have been scarred by sin. With love and compassion He helps us leave an old life of moral slavery to sin and then to live free from its stain and guilt. In Christ, we can truly be born again! That’s the gospel; that’s good news!

The Lord Jesus sent forth His apostles with this charge, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). We must continue to make disciples and preach the same gospel that the apostles preached from the beginning. Why? Because we still need His saving grace and the healing that His forgiveness brings. As long as sin corrupts souls, we must preach the truth, the truth that brings eternal life. The gospel truth is God’s hope for our families, our nation, and the world. Nothing is so needed or important.

People need the gospel today more than ever. We won’t find freedom from sin by ignoring it or by acting like it’s irrelevant. Sin isn’t irrelevant to God. Sin remains as God’s enemy and the enemy to our souls. Those who follow Christ realize that God gave the answer to man’s sin problem in the preaching of the gospel. Today faithful Christians can speak like the apostle Paul when he said, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I’m eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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 1:14-16). God’s gospel message still has that same power to save and to free from sin. As Christians we’re obligated to share this salvation with you.

Paul said, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, and by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). Jesus died so that we might be free from sin and live to righteousness. God raised Him up to provide evidence to all that Jesus is truly Lord of all. There is indeed life after death and there is a judgment. Jesus came to give us eternal life, and it’s eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

Hebrews 3:1 reminds us that we have a “heavenly calling.” It’s a call from heaven to live with Christ forever. Second Timothy 1:9 says Jesus “saved us and called us with a holy calling.” God calls us to live holy lives. We can’t conform to the world’s lack of morality or empty values which only ruin lives and confuse children morally. Many want freedom to sin, but sin only brings enslavement and sorrow. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). Many think they have control of their lives, but their sin has made them slaves.

Christ makes us free from sin and leads us to holiness. He promises us freedom and a place in His family. First Peter 2:9-10 describes Christians: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you

once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Christianity is more than a mere religion; it’s a relationship with the God who called us out of darkness, the darkness of sin and into His marvelous light. We were nobodies until God called to make us His people; we were lost in sin until He forgave us.

Sadly, some will not hear His call. The Lord Jesus said, that “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘Well I’ve bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.’ Another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.’ And another one said, ‘I’ve married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.’ And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, ‘You go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner’” (Luke 14:16-24).

God invites, but He doesn’t make us eat. He wants us to follow Him and enjoy His grace, but we must answer His call. He loves us and wants our love in return. Some desire the blessing of Christ but they’re unwilling to submit to Him as Lord of their lives. They’d rather have the slavery of sin than the freedom of Christ. The Lord Jesus describes the person who fails to take advantage of His grace and His love in a story that’s found in Matthew 22:11-14.

It says, “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Not everyone is willing to listen to the gospel call. Some refuse to hear God. God created you and gave you life. He provided every good thing you’ve ever enjoyed. You might think the king was wrong to punish the man who failed to wear the wedding clothes. Some scholars say that kings on special occasions provided guests with garments; others say the man ignored the wedding custom. Either way, this man disobeyed. God won’t welcome you unless you’re clothed in righteousness. We must be washed in the blood of Christ.

My friend, Ron Thomas, who is a preacher in Illinois, recently reminded me of Proverbs 13:19, which says, “Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.” Fools hate turning from evil and doing what’s right. Jeremiah 36 tells how Jeremiah dictated to Baruch the prophecies of God. Baruch read the words of Jeremiah to the people in the temple, and later he read them to the officials. The officials knew the king needed to hear the words, but they feared for Jeremiah and Baruch, so they had Jeremiah and Baruch hide. When King Jehoiakim heard the words of Jeremiah warning the people to repent of their idolatry and of the coming wrath of God, he refused to listen. After each three or four columns were read, he cut off those columns and threw them into the fire until the whole

scroll was burned (Jeremiah 36:23). Jehoiakim wouldn't listen and Jehoiakim wouldn't repent. Some still despise the very words of eternal life because they don't want to leave their sins. They don't think they need to repent or to be saved from their sins, so they become scoffers. They see no reason to respond to God's call in the gospel.

You can say no to God, but what good will it do? The Lord Jesus said, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:25-27). You can burn a Bible, but you can't destroy the Word of God. You can scoff at God today, but you won't be scoffing when God judges you by the very words that you despised.

Some scoff; others turn a deaf ear; still others try to rewrite Scripture to suit themselves, but God's Word doesn't change. What the Lord spoke in the first century stands true for all time. In the first century some Jews tried to change the gospel. The apostle Paul said, "I'm amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing 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 what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-9). The true gospel calls us to hear and to obey. Will you listen and respond to His loving call? Will you love Him as He loved you?

God warns us, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-3). God is calling us to eternal life through the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. We must never neglect the One who has created us and loved us. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead, proving that He is truly Lord and the Son of God. We have been given a great salvation in Christ. Should we not listen to Him?

Jesus Christ is also calling us to a transformed and holy life. He has not rescued us from this present evil age for us to continue living in sin. He wants something better for us. He offers forgiveness so that we might learn to forgive; He offers love so that we might learn to love; He offers truth so that we might spot the hurtful lies of the devil. He gives strength when we're weak; comfort when we hurt; and courage when we're afraid. How can we neglect His call? How can we neglect so great a salvation?

To become a Christian you must answer His call in the gospel. Believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and make Him your Lord. Turn away from sin; don't let sin take control of your life. Follow the Lord. Confess your faith in Christ to everyone, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. When you're baptized into Christ, you are united with Him and you become a member of His body, the church. When you're baptized into Christ, the Lord washes away your sin according to Acts 22:16. The Lord is calling you to believe and obey. Don't neglect this call of the gospel. Answer God's call by obeying Him. Don't let another day pass. Won't you say yes to Jesus Christ?

Thy Will Be Done

If the will of God was done on earth as it is in heaven, what would happen? Today we're going to explore the effects of God's will being done on earth. When people do God's will, they act wisely and find blessing. Solomon proclaimed, "Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the Lord, And discover the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:2-5). We must search out God's will and practice it; only then can we be the people that God intended.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). I encourage you to pray that with me. Pray "Your will be done"; pray it every day. Please pray it fervently, repeatedly, and confidently. Let's call upon God to work His will in our own lives, in our homes, in our communities, and in our nation. Should the Lord's will be done on earth, our lives would see the greatest benefits. God's ways are always best.

People often think God's teaching is naïve or backward or mistaken. They don't like what He teaches because what He teaches disagrees with today's culture or teaches against what they want to do. Some have assumed that God is unkind or unwise because He teaches against sin. But, from ages past, God has seen everything and He knows all. He knows what will bless and what will hurt. With wisdom and love He teaches us what is best. We deceive ourselves if we imagine that we can improve on God's will. God has true wisdom that leads to life. So we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in Matthew 6:9-13. "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'"

When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, He knew what would happen to Him in the coming hours. He knew of Judas' betrayal, of Peter's denial, and of His false condemnation. He knew He would be mocked, scourged, and crucified. He chose to endure the suffering and to bear the sins of mankind. In the garden He prayed fervently with His face to the ground and with loud crying that this cup might pass from Him. He knew how difficult His sacrifice would be. But this was not all that He prayed. In His agony He prayed, "not my will, but yours, be done." The Father's will was more important to Jesus than His own will.

And so, Jesus chose to sacrifice His own will because He loved the Father and He loved you and me. He set His wants and His desires aside for a larger purpose. He chose to suffer for a time, so that we could be blessed forever. He chose to die, so that we might live. He put our needs before His safety and comfort. He died the way that He lived, utterly selfless. His sacrifice calls us to love Him and to live righteous lives. It calls us to rise above petty selfishness and to follow the will of God.

What if we all had the heart and mind of Jesus? What if we too set aside our wants and desires to serve a larger purpose? What if we pledged our lives and hearts to something bigger than ourselves? What if we genuinely gave God first place in our choices, rather than ourselves? The biggest hindrance to God's will being done on earth is our own selfish desires.

We live as selfish people in a selfish world, and selfishness has caused every heartache and conflict since the beginning of time.

Selfishness is the root of every sin and every conflict. People sin because they love pleasures more than they love God or more than they love other people. Sin promises pleasure and it appeals to our pride, but it always ends up destroying those who practice it. Sin, pride, and immoral pleasures are our enemy. They always have been and they always will be. Don't be deceived, thinking that you can practice your will in defiance of God and still enjoy His blessing.

First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." We must learn to love and to serve the Lord. God offers His grace and blessing to everyone who loves and does His will.

Because selfishness fills the world, people scoff and make fun of the will of God. Some think they have a better way to find happiness, but their ways end in bitterness and destruction. The devil has always rebelled and opposed God. He fights God's will with lies and with schemes. The Lord Jesus described the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. And whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he's a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

The will of God frees us from Satan's deceit and falsehoods. That's why we need the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. We must expose the lies and follow the truth. Only then can we find peace and freedom from the enslavement of sin. Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, that you're slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" We need the will of God to be done on earth so that we don't fall into enslaving ourselves into something that will hurt us.

If the Lord's will were done on earth, it would affect our morals. God teaches us to be holy because it is best for us, best for our families, and best for everyone. When people live outside the will of God, they harm themselves and others. They set the wrong example for the young and bring problems upon themselves. More than forty percent of the births in America are to unwed parents. How will these parents ever be able to lead their children to live righteously unless they themselves repent?

First Thessalonians 4:3-5 says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God." Paul explains, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification, (that is, in holiness)" (verses 7 and 8). Then he says, "he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

If the Lord's will were done on earth, it would affect our relationships. People would follow the golden rule found in Matthew 7:12, "In everything, therefore, (the Lord says) treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Can you imagine how different our world would be if everyone practiced the Golden Rule? We'd stop gossiping about others, stop ignoring the needs of others, stop thinking that we're better than others, and stop mistreating others as if they didn't matter. We'd respect others just as we'd want their

respect. We wouldn't show favoritism. First Corinthians 13:5 reminds us that love "does not act unbecomingly" (discourteously); love is courteous. Love learns to say "thank you" and "please."

If we did the Lord's will, we'd love the way He loves. The Lord Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Loving the way Jesus loves calls us to sacrifice ourselves for the best interests of others.

If we follow the Lord's will, we will even love our enemies. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:43-45).

The Lord Jesus taught us to be peacemakers. Romans 12:14-18 says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. And if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

When we do God's will, we forgive. This world would have much more peace if people forgave one another. Instead, many pursue the path of anger and vengeance. Romans 12:19-21 says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Remember the prayer of Jesus as He was crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

If the Lord's will were done on earth, it would also affect the religious world. The Lord Jesus warned of false prophets who come as wolves in sheep's clothing in Matthew 7:15-20. They exploit others in the name of God to satisfy their own appetites. The Lord said, "You will know them by their fruits." How sad that much of what calls itself Christianity today is much more of an enterprise rather than a faith; it's more commercial than it is spiritual. It's heartbreaking that some think all Christianity is like the false Christianity that's so prevalent in today's world. It's no wonder worldly people mock such false Christians and miss what is true and genuine.

If people really decided to obey God's revealed will, they wouldn't invent their own churches but would follow the Scriptures. They wouldn't build their own denominations or organizations and vote on what they think they believe as if they could overrule Jesus Christ. Rather they would acknowledge Psalm 119:89, which says, "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven." They wouldn't give themselves exalted religious titles but would focus on Jesus Christ.

If people really decided to obey God's revealed will, they'd follow the one and only gospel. Galatians 1:6-9 says there's only one gospel. They'd understand that the grace of God works through the one gospel so they wouldn't invent new ways to be saved or ignore what God requires for salvation. They'd teach the necessity of faith, the necessity of repentance, and baptism for people to be saved. They'd teach that the grace of God works through baptism instead of telling people they don't have to be baptized to be saved. They'd realize that the

blood of Christ washes away our sins when we are baptized, and we're baptized into His death according to Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3-7.

If the Lord's will were done on earth, it would affect our worship. Instead of trying to entertain ourselves we'd focus on praising God according to His teaching and His will. Instead of inventing new ways to worship, we'd look to Scripture to find what God's will is. God wills that we remember and proclaim the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Christians are to partake of the Lord's Supper each Lord's day, which is the first day of the week.

The Lord teaches Christians to sing from their hearts. In their singing they are to teach, and to admonish, to praise, and to give thanks to the Father through Jesus. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him (that is, through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." The music of the early church that's found in the New Testament, which might surprise you, was entirely vocal, emphasizing the words that were sung. There simply is no command or example of any church using instruments in the New Testament. The idea of using an instrument of music didn't enter into their minds. In fact, Christians in the second and third centuries vehemently opposed the use of instruments as worldly, pagan, or Jewish. The will of God for the church is that people sing from their hearts using their lips. The use of instruments of music in Christian worship was an innovation that actually came many centuries later.

Please join me in praying each day what Jesus prayed, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We need the will of God on earth today. Our hope for a better life isn't in Hollywood, Wall Street, sports, alcohol, casinos or government; it's in Jesus Christ. Let's pray and practice God's will.

Adelaide Pollard wrote these words in a hymn: "Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay! Mold me and make me, After Thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still." Will you let God's will totally have its way in your life? Will you let God mold and make you like Christ? Will you love like Jesus, live like Jesus, pray like Jesus, and be obedient to the Father's will like Jesus? Surrender yourself to the Lord. Don't resist Him. Are you playing religion with Him, sometimes obeying Him and sometimes following your desires? Are you flirting with a false Christianity?

The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Many think they can play games with God or negotiate their way to heaven, but you can't call Jesus "Lord" if you follow your own will. You can't expect to enter heaven, if you're not willing to follow the Lord's teaching and make Him first in your life.

You'll never want to do the Lord's will until you believe in Him and love Him. We love because He first loved us. We believe because of the evidence that was revealed that He did arise from the dead. Because we love Him, we'll trust in Him and in His teaching. Out of faith and love we'll repent by turning from sin to live righteously. Out of love we'll confess Jesus as the Christ to all and we'll be baptized into Him. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38 says, "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." Instead of arguing about whether to be baptized, let's simply do the will of God.

God's Ways

You can travel in many directions, but what is the way to please God. Today we're going to look at the ways of men and the way of God. We must never assume that our ways are God's way. Humans are limited and don't see or know all things the way that God does. Many people think like the old song, "I did it my way," thinking this will bring them success and happiness. We mustn't deceive ourselves; we aren't as wise as God. God speaks out of wisdom and love to teach us what's best for us and what will bless us and our families. If we reject God and put our trust in our own wisdom or in our own desires, we'll bring chaos and ruin upon ourselves. Bible history proves this again and again. Some doubt religion, but God's way is still proving itself true and best time after time.

In Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus went to Damascus so that if he found anyone belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Paul admitted, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons" (Acts 22:4). However, Paul proclaimed to his Jewish persecutors, "This I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers" (Acts 24:14). Paul was deceived early in life, but when he learned the truth about Jesus He gladly followed the Way. I hope you too will follow the Way. God cares for your soul and wants you to know the truth. God's message comes from His heart to yours because He doesn't want you to fall for Satan's lies.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John 14:1-6. "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. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Jesus is indeed "the way, the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father except through Him." The Father in heaven sent Jesus into this world to save mankind from sin. During His ministry, Jesus worked genuine miracles, showed utter love, taught amazing truths, and was truly "God with us." He predicted His own scourging and death, and it proved true. He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and it proved true. The Father raised Him from the dead on the third day according to the prophecies in Scripture and according to His own prophecy. Jesus was indeed the Son of God and He alone is the way to the Father.

The God that people think they know and the God of the Bible are not always the same. Some read certain passages about God and assume that this is the whole picture of God. They want so badly for God to be how they picture Him they ignore other scriptures. To know the true God, we must listen to everything that He says about Himself. We can't invent our own picture of God and believe that that's going to reflect what God is truly like. We must take time to study the word of God to know His way. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor 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."

When I hear some folks talk the way they do, it's clear they haven't studied the nature of God as it's revealed in Scripture. They assume from movies and popular thinking that they

know God. They think God will allow them to believe or to do anything that they please and God will never judge them or hold them accountable for it. Some, I'm convinced, have a view that God is like a benevolent but isolated and benign old grandfather who ignores what they do but gives them his love and blessing no matter what. It's at this point that the devil steps in with lies and counterfeits to deceive people and lead them into error and ultimately into condemnation. The devil smiles when people believe a lie. Here are some lies that reflect the devil's ways.

Some think God is too good to punish anyone for sin. They think because God is gracious to forgive that He'll forgive even the evildoers. They forget the Lord God has a track record of punishing evil. Second Peter 2:4-10 says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what's going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was being tormented and they tormented his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); (well the conclusion is this) then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones." If God punished the angels, the ancient world, and the ungodly cities, He'll punish evildoers on the last day.

When God speaks about truth or morals, He means business. If we take Him lightly or ignore His warnings, we only bring trouble on ourselves. God isn't fickle like humans; He speaks the truth clearly and with finality. He doesn't take back His commandments or His warnings. What God said in the Scriptures in the first century is just as binding today as it was when the Holy Spirit moved men to write. Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" What Jesus Christ called sin in the first century is still sin today. Nothing has changed; so do not be deceived!

We must all examine our morals and what we believe and practice. Let's cease to do evil and start practicing what is right and good. If the Lord teaches something different from what we believe or do, then let's give them up and follow the way of the Lord. The apostle Paul said, "I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Paul knew by experience that one could sin, thinking all along he was doing right. Rather than admit to our sins, many justify themselves with excuses for their wrongdoing. It's easy to deceive ourselves about our sins.

Some think God doesn't remember the past; but again, God is not like humanity, He is not like you or me. Second Peter 3:8 says, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." God isn't limited like we are. Time doesn't erase His memory. When God forgives, our sins are forgotten. God doesn't forgive sin when people fail to repent and remain in those sins. They'll have to pay the penalty for their sins. Do not be deceived!

Some think God only requires faith for a person to be saved. Very frankly, this is not God's way. God also requires love, repentance, and obedience. First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed." We often assume God's love for us, but we must also love the Lord ourselves. The Lord Jesus said, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). No one can continue in sin; we must change our hearts to follow God's way. The Lord Jesus expects us to be obedient just as He was obedient. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." It takes more than faith; do not be deceived!

Some think God wants us to repent and believe, but He doesn't require baptism for salvation. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). For more than a thousand years Christians never disputed that this referred to baptism and baptism was necessary to salvation. When Ananias came to Saul in Acts 22:16, he gave Saul the message of the Lord Jesus, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Baptism is the time when God washes away sins through the blood of Jesus. Romans 6:3-7 and Colossians 2:12-13 explain that baptism is an act of faith in the working of God. By grace God saves us in and through baptism.

In the sixteenth century men began teaching the sovereignty of God, and what that meant was that people couldn't choose whether to obey the Lord. They thought they were born in sin and couldn't change, that God had to change them miraculously. They also taught salvation by grace meant that one couldn't be saved by works and they believed that baptism was a work and so it didn't save. Unfortunately, they misunderstood many things.

First, man does indeed have free will and can change. This is why God, in every age, has called men to repent. Repentance is a change of heart leading to a change of ways. Why would God command us to repent, knowing that we didn't have that ability, and then condemn us for not repenting? This doctrine makes God into an evil monster. Do not be deceived!

Second, baptism is how God works on us. 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." This passage clearly states that God buries us in baptism, raises us up in baptism, and forgives our sins in baptism. God is the active one and we receive His action by being baptized. To say baptism is unnecessary for salvation is to refuse to let God work in our lives.

The notion that we are saved by faith is true, but it's not the whole truth. According to the Scriptures, there are many factors that are essential to our salvation. We can't segregate one concept to the exclusion of all the others. Understanding the whole truth means that we understand all that the Bible says on a subject rather than separating out only one factor. This is why salvation by faith is true, but salvation by faith alone is false.

The Scripture teaches many things are involved in our salvation. For instance, Titus 3:5 says we are saved "by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." That's a reference to baptism. Romans 1:16 says the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation," that

is, the preaching of the Truth. Acts 2:38 says we're to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins." First Peter 3:21 says "baptism now saves you." Acts 22:16 says "be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Hebrews 5:9 says Jesus is "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." The blood of Jesus washes away our sins when we believe and are obedient to Him. Romans 6:3-7 says that when we're baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. That's when we're born again; that's when we have that newness of life. In baptism we're crucified with Christ so that our body of sin might be done away with. It's clear from these verses and many other Scriptures that faith is not the only necessary factor when it comes to being saved by the Lord Jesus. Do not be deceived!

Some think that because God is love, He will allow us to believe whatever we wish whether it follows His teaching in Scripture or not. Love in their minds means unconditional tolerance of whatever we want. They imagine Christ will allow His ways to change with the times. Therefore, they assume that we may change Christ's commands on morals, on salvation, on the church, on heaven and hell, or on the Judgment, and if it doesn't fit with our popular beliefs then we can just change them. God's love is deep and wide. Nobody has ever loved you or will ever love you more than the Lord Jesus who died for your sins. We ought to treasure and respect that love in every way possible.

One thing is certain: we must never take Christ's amazing love for granted or presume upon the grace of God. The Lord loves us enough to teach us what's true and right and good. When we reject what He says or when we suppose that we can improve on what God teaches, we aren't honoring His love. We're belittling it! Do not be deceived!

Isaiah 55:6-9 says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 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." Seek the Lord while He may be found. God provides for us an opportunity to get our lives right and to start following His way.

The first beatitude in Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Being "poor in spirit" is to be utterly humble. A person who is full of himself or herself, has no room for God. When a person seeks his own ways or thinks God's way isn't as good as his own he cannot expect God to bless him. God wants His people to love Him and to follow His way. Remember: God is God, and we are not. God's ways are higher than ours, and He will not change His will to fit our culture. God demands all people everywhere to follow His way.

Humility means being obedient to the gospel. Believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of your sins and turn to what is right. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. When the Jews at Pentecost wanted to get right with God, Peter said, "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). That's what we urge you to do today!

Keeping My Zeal

Some Christians live their lives to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some passionately pursue their faith, while others are lukewarm. How can we keep our passion and zeal for God alive? We love to study the Bible because we know the real author of the Bible is God. Peter said, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21). Men didn't dream up the words of the Bible; rather God's spokesmen, the prophets, were moved by the Spirit to speak. They said what God willed for us to know, to believe, and to do. Because the Bible is from God, we can begin to understand the heart of God and His love for us.

Today we're asking the question, "How can I keep my zeal for Christ and renew my passion for God?" I don't want a bored and dull faith. I don't want to forget what the Lord has done for me. The Lord created me, loved me, protected me, provided for me, taught me, disciplined me, and is preparing a home for me in heaven. How could I become apathetic toward one who has heard my prayers and opened doors for me? David expressed my heart, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). God is our hope, our joy, and our Savior. Staying close to Him will keep our passion alive.

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter 1:5-11. "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty, the kind of thirst that demands you find some water? Israel knew what it was to have little water available. Israel had seasons of rain and seasons that didn't have much rain. Their streams would flow in the rainy seasons and dry up at other times. They could collect water in their cisterns, hoping to have enough water to last until the rains return.

In the seventh century B.C., Israel turned its back on God and followed after the vain idols of nations surrounding them. God said about Israel, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). By forsaking God they also had forsaken the source of life. Don't imagine something else can take the place of God. Nothing and no one can.

The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). When was the last time that you were thirsty for righteousness

or for God? When did you last feel that being close to Him, worshiping Him, or listening to Him was an immediate demand? It's easy to forget what you have and take God for granted. God knows when people ignore Him, and forget Him, and forsake Him. Do you imagine that God will run to your side when you have neglected Him for many years?

Good relationships demand time and effort. Just like a marriage or any relationship, it can grow stale, and so our love for God can grow dull over time. If we want to strengthen our relationship, then we must take the time to make it grow and develop. We must first start paying close attention to what God says. 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 so great a salvation?" If we neglect to listen to God's Word, we'll fail to please Him, and we risk the salvation of our souls.

Some people ignore God until they need Him. They focus their minds on the things of this world while they slowly drift away from God to pursue their own interests. They stop going to worship at church; they stop studying the Scriptures; they stop praying; and they begin talking and acting like the world. When some disaster then comes along, they feel God is distant. God doesn't forget His people, but His people frequently forget Him.

If you really want to have God in your heart take, a long look at what the Lord endured on the cross. The Lord Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). The Lord Jesus loves you beyond measure. He opened His heart to reach out to everyone. He bore the cross to die for the sins not just of the whole world but also for you. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't rule you out because you were imperfect. The only people Jesus died for were sinners.

See the crown of thorns on His head; see the nails through His hands and feet; see His back bloodied by the scourge; see His side pierced by the soldier; and see His blood offered for you. He suffered the shame of people mocking Him. He sacrificed Himself, "and with his stripes we are healed." "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6). If the reality of what happened on the cross doesn't touch you like it once did, perhaps it's because you've let other things cause your heart to harden. Worldliness and sin cause people's hearts to grow cold.

Jesus didn't die on the cross to proclaim a health and wealth gospel that puts you in the center of the universe. He didn't die on the cross to help you become a millionaire, lose weight, or overcome your fears and anxieties. He sacrificed Himself to redeem your soul from sin and to give you eternal life. His blood washes away your sin and causes you to be born again so you'll be created in His image and become like Him. The Lord is interested in your inner man; and one day He will judge your soul on whether you gave of yourself as a humble servant.

In times of great prosperity people tend to take their minds off of God and put them on their own personal pleasures. Just as Israel was about to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land, Moses warned them, "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I'm commanding you today; otherwise, when you've eaten and are satisfied, and you've built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

Don't let your blessings keep you from remembering the One who gave you those blessings. 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." Apart from God we would have nothing. God is the One who gives us the ability to think, to work, and to make money. Moses said, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). The world wants you to be proud of all of your accomplishments. The Lord wants you to remember that every blessing that you have comes from what God provides in you and for you.

Some people turn away from God because they've faced some trying experience or circumstance. Rather than pull away from God we need to draw close to God when we face a struggle or a heartache. We should turn to God for strength, for help, for encouragement, and for assurance.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." In hard times let's remember that God can do things that men cannot.

We draw close to God by making Him a priority in our lives every single day. We study the Bible because it reveals God's thinking and His will for our lives. To know God we have to listen to His words. We pray because we want God to know our hearts. First Thessalonians 5:17 teaches us to "pray without ceasing." God doesn't want us to quit praying. James 5:13 says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." If you want to be zealous for God, then make being with God a daily exercise. You build good relationships; they don't just happen.

Therefore, to draw close to God, remember what He has done for you. David said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that's within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (Psalm 103:1-5). God is ever good to you. Consider how God has answered your prayers, given you the Scriptures that give you hope and comfort, and strengthened you through the years.

If you want to draw close to God, keep your eyes on eternity. Colossians 3:1-4 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

To draw close to God, focus on the good. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there's any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." When we concentrate on the negative we lose sight of God; but when we concentrate on the positive, we grow more thankful to God.

If you wish to be close to God, you've got to give Him room in your life. You must get the weeds out of your heart and soul. Just as weeds can take over a garden, so spiritual weeds can take over your heart. Weeds rob plants of the space and the nourishment that they need to grow and produce. Likewise, distractions of life can rob us of our time and our energy for God. The

Lord Jesus said, “The seed that fell among the thorns, stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14). Many Christians fail to grow in their faith and in their relationship with God because they devote themselves to things that push God out of their lives. We must learn not to let the things of this world come between God and us.

Sin destroys our desire to serve God because it replaces God and enslaves us. Ephesians 4:27 says, “do not give the devil an opportunity.” If you let sin into your life, it will dominate your heart. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). To overcome sin, you must put it to death. Romans 6:11 says, “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” You can't cut down a weed and expect to kill it; you must uproot it. If you simply cut it down, you'll see it grow back. Sin is like that. You can't just cut back on sin and expect that sin to go away. You must remove it altogether. Unless it's completely stopped it'll keep growing and crowding out what is good and productive in your life.

You can't grow to be a productive and authentic Christian if you crowd God out by your whims and desires. You must give Him room in your life to grow. Many people let their jobs, their hobbies, or their recreation come between God and themselves. None of these things is wrong in and of themselves; but if you let something, anything, take you away from your God you can lose your soul. The Lord Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

All this matters because it affects our relationship and our zeal for God. When our relationship is strong, then our hearts want to serve God; but when our relationship is weak, we let other things dominate our lives. If you wish to be zealous for God, then set your heart upon the Lord Jesus and upon all the blessings He has in store for you in eternity!

Is there anything in your life that's keeping you from being close to God? Some people never pick up a Bible, never utter a prayer, and never go to church. Is it any wonder that they feel far from God? They've shut the Lord out of their lives; and people grieve God when they shut Him out. He hasn't quit loving or caring for us, but it tears at God's heart to be abandoned by His people. If you're letting sin have a place in your heart, then it's time to put an end to that sin. You can't love sin and love God at the same time. James 4:4 says, “do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

To be rid of sin, you must repent. Repentance is an act of the heart that says, “I will no longer do what offends God, but I will please Him.” In repentance we put a stop to sin, but we must also be forgiven. The Lord forgives us when by faith and repentance we're willing to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized. In baptism, we're crucified with Christ, “in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). Baptism is that time that God saves us from sin.

Don't let your love for Christ grow cold. Don't grow weary of your faith and lose heart. Renew your faith! Restore your heart! Revive your spirit! Demonstrate your faith and love. Listen to God; love God, pray to God; grow a desire for God; and tell everyone about His goodness and kindness in Christ Jesus. Get involved!