

# *Program Transcripts*

For November 2014



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



# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**November 2014**

## **NOVEMBER 2 – THE CALLED OUT BODY**

Did you know that the church is the called out body of Christ? The Lord Jesus has called His people out of the world to follow Him. Have you denied yourself, taken up your cross today, and followed Him?

## **NOVEMBER 9 – THE DEVIL’S SCHEMES**

Some question whether the devil exists or not, but the Bible reveals all the troubles he brings to this world. The devil is wise and strong, and his agenda is to oppose God in every way. In this program we’ll take a look at his schemes.

## **NOVEMBER 16 – DOCTRINE MATTERS**

Some say it doesn’t matter what you believe; others think no one is interested in doctrine anymore; and still others think we ought to forget doctrine, because it is divisive. How does God look at His doctrine?

## **NOVEMBER 23 – GIVE THANKS**

Giving thanks should be as natural for the Christian as breathing air. Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17). Thankfulness describes the basis of our faith in God and our love for God. Let us give thanks.

## **NOVEMBER 30 – DO YOU BELIEVE?**

To say we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gospel means that we are willing to accept what the Bible says is true. What we believe and how we act on our faith is as important as claiming we believe.

## "The Called Out Body"

Did you know that the church is the called out body of Christ? Today we're looking at how the church was called together to follow the Lord Jesus. The Lord wisely established His church because He knew what a blessing it would be for everyone. When people follow the wise teaching of Jesus in Scripture, the church acts as the body of Christ on earth today. The Scriptures show kindness, teach the saving truth, help the poor, care for the children, and train the young to live Godly and spiritual lives. Jesus calls people to be His disciples and to do His work. Every person who wants to do something meaningful with his life can do no better than to follow Jesus.

Our English word "church" is the normal translation for a Greek term *ekklesia*. The word *ekklesia* literally means "called out" and refers to an assembly or a congregation that's been called together for a purpose. The church is made up of the Lord's people called out from the world, disciples who have denied themselves and taken up their crosses to follow Him. The church consists of those who have been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. When a person is baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, the Lord adds him to the church, His body. So, the church is made up of the saved who devote their lives in service to the Lord.

We must be careful to distinguish popular religion from genuine devotion to the Lord. Some religious groups today focus on some human leader rather than on Jesus Christ. Others have turned their faith into a religious enterprise, complete with entertainment. Still others have turned to opinions and traditions of men and have rejected the Word of God. What is the called out body of Jesus really like? You may search and find the true church in Scripture.

Our reading today comes from the book of Acts 2:37-41. "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." The New Testament describes the church as the "called out" people who believe and obey the Lord. When the Scriptures use the word "church" in the singular, it refers to everyone who has obeyed the one, true gospel and whom the Lord has added to His body, the church. The church began in Jerusalem, but because of persecution scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8:4 says, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." As new congregations developed in the places where they traveled, they didn't start new denominations with different names and creeds. They built new congregations around the inspired word that they had learned from the apostles.

The gospel was good news to them, and they would not depart from what they had learned. The Lord Jesus in The Gospel According to Matthew instructed the apostles to teach others what He had taught them. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). They didn't teach

what people thought Christianity should be; they preached the Word of God! Disciples learn from their Master; they teach what their Master taught.

They remembered what Jesus said, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). They didn’t want to add to His words or take away from them; they simply wanted to obey the Lord. They trusted Jesus to be their Lord and to know what was right for them to do. Colossians 1:18 says, “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” The church uniquely belongs to Jesus and Jesus alone. No group can vote Him out or overrule what He teaches or what He instructs; and He is the one that gives the church what to believe and what to practice. Our culture may change with the times, but the Lord doesn’t change His teaching to suit the times. If He were following us, then He would be our servant, but that’s not the way things are. He is the Lord; and our task is to deny ourselves and to follow Him.

Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). The early Christians wanted to be true disciples and to be free, so that they remained within His teaching. Many people today follow the traditions of men or the thinking of the time and they lose sight of what Jesus actually taught.

When people move away from the Word of Jesus, they cease to be His disciples. When people develop their own “churches,” designed after their own opinions and their human traditions, they cease to be followers of Jesus. The apostle Paul warned 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). You might attend a congregation that you really like and one that perhaps entertains you with ideas that you want to hear; but, if that congregation teaches you things that are untrue, things that are different from what the Word of God teaches, it will do you more harm than good. Only the truth can set you free!

The called out body of Christ must be devoted to the truth. The Lord, in the early days, appointed leaders whose purpose was to spiritually train every member of the body. Ephesians 4:12-13 says God gave these leaders, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Jesus didn’t appoint men to develop their own doctrines but to bring the church to the unity of the faith; that is, to all follow the same belief. Following the true doctrine and knowing the truth about the Son of God causes people to mature spiritually.

Paul said, “Him (speaking about Jesus) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature (or complete) in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). When people mature in their faith and in their knowledge of Jesus, they can avoid the trickery and lies of the devil. The apostle Paul explains the value of this maturity; he wants us to be mature “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes”

(Ephesians 4:14). Every silly and crafty religious doctrine fills our society; and people who don't know the Scriptures get caught up in its deception. Don't be fooled; the truth matters. Wouldn't you rather have the wisdom of God than the opinions of men?

When we mature spiritually, we'll be able to distinguish the good from the evil, the true from the false, and right from wrong. Sadly, some folks in the early church didn't grow in their knowledge of God and His Word like they should have. The Hebrew writer criticized some people, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14). I fear many today are in the same shape; they need someone to teach them the basics of Christianity. Because they study books by humans and not the Bible, they often cannot distinguish true Christianity from a corrupted religion.

God wants His people to know the truth and to love the truth. Ephesians 4:15-16 teaches us to avoid deceitful doctrines, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Devotion to Christ means that we'll speak the truth in love. Devotion to Christ unites people and gets them working and serving. The love of Christ causes people to love each other and to build up one another. The church that loves the Lord, works for the Lord, and loves each other will just grow and grow.

The Christian life in the body of Christ is one of constant development and growth. God encourages us: "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 earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4). We are called to set our minds on Christ and the things above; He is our life! When we give our lives to the Lord here on earth, we can go to live with Christ in glory in heaven. Our task is not to please people here but to focus on pleasing God.

As a body, we are called to worship and to serve the Lord. The apostle Peter described members of the church in this way: "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). The Lord wants us to offer up spiritual sacrifices that God can accept. He wants us to worship as people devoted to the Lord with our hearts, those hearts that are right before God. In the church that Jesus built everyone is a priest and everyone has a responsibility to worship and to serve God.

When the early church assembled together they sang hymns; they communed in the Lord's Supper; they prayed; they collected money to support the works of the church; and they listened to the preaching of the Word. Paul's epistle to the Colossians was designed to be read to the assembled congregation or church. He wrote, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). Paul said in this letter, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). The early

church was to sing psalms and hymns to God, teaching and admonishing one another, letting the Word of Christ richly dwell within their hearts with thanksgiving. Notice that the emphasis in this passage is on what is sung, not on what sounds good. They were to teach and admonish one another, not entertain. They were to give thanks to God, not perform for each other. There's no suggestion of using an instrument in this passage.

The early church also assembled to eat the Lord's Supper and to commune with Christ. Paul wrote, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The church remembers the Lord's body and blood given on the cross each Lord's day by partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Whether we are assembled or not, we ought to please God, and do as He wants us to do. Hebrews 13:15-16 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. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Our focus must always be on loving God and loving one another. Colossians 3:14-15 says, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, and whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." Are you pleasing God? Are you living in such a way that you keep His commandments? Jesus called His people out through the preaching of the gospel to live loving and godly lives, to worship Him, to do good to others, and to share the gospel with others. Let's follow the example of the apostle Peter. When several didn't like what Jesus taught and withdrew from Him, Jesus asked His apostles, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and we have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God'" (John 6:68-69). Jesus Christ alone has the words of eternal life, so we must turn to Him and His teaching.

The Lord expects us not only to believe His teaching, but also to get involved in His church. "Hebrews 10:25 warns us not to forsake "our own assembling together, as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." The New Testament church always appeared in identifiable congregations who met regularly on the first day of the week to worship and to care for one another. If you can assemble with the saints, you should. It will bless you to be a part of the church that follows Jesus.

To become a member of the Lord's church, to be saved, and to become a Christian – all that takes place at the same time – you must be obedient to His Word. Peter told the guilty at Pentecost to "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Acts 2:41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." The Lord adds those who repent and are baptized, and are saved, to His church. Wouldn't you like to be part of God's called out body of believers? Obey the Lord, and He will add you to His church today!

## The Devil's Schemes

Some question whether the devil exists or not, but the Bible reveals all the troubles that he brings to this world. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God's Word gives us light and hope; it teaches us the way to eternal life. It also protects us from the lies and the schemes of the devil. Your Bible can help you understand what the devil will say and do to try to pull you away from God and from His blessing. The psalmist said, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You (Psalm 119:11). The more we know God's Word, the better we can stop the devil from taking us captive to sin. We need to know the truth of God's Word, so we can say no to the devil.

Peter warns us, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Just like a lion prowls around for its prey, so the devil seeks out people he can deceive and devour. The devil may pretend to like you, but he's only interested in exploiting you. He may promise you all kinds of pleasure, but his promises fail in time.

The Bible says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:7-8). If you draw near to God, the devil will not defeat you. God promises us a way of escape so that we may endure and escape the strategies of Satan who wants to steal our souls (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we're to defeat the devil we must learn how the devil works.

Our reading today comes from the book of Ephesians 6:10-13. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

Someone says, "Well, I'm just not sure there is such a person as the devil." Jesus believed in the devil, and in fact He met him face to face, as is recorded in Matthew chapter 4. He found out that Satan works through lies and through deception. The Lord Jesus told some of the unbelieving Jews, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). People get fooled by lies because they think that what is a lie is actually true. The devil fools them and the devil realizes that if he tells a lie long enough and loud enough, gullible people will come to believe it.

Satan is a cunning adversary who hides his real intentions. Paul warned the church about false apostles; he said, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it's not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). These false apostles taught error and exploited the people for their own pleasure. They didn't care how their lies affected anyone as long as they satisfied their lusts.

How do you spot a counterfeit? Counterfeits try to look as much like the real thing as possible, but there are always differences. People who handle cash study genuine bills like this

ten-dollar bill. They know every detail about a bill, so that when a fake, counterfeit bill comes, they can see its faults. In the same way, the Bible provides us with the standard of what is genuine, so that when the devil introduces a counterfeit religion or a counterfeit church, we can spot it for what it is! Let's look at some of the devil's counterfeits.

First, the devil does his best to remove God from the next generation. He's urging them to take their focus off of God and what the Bible teaches. He tells them the Bible is old-fashioned, judgmental, and mean. In reality, the Bible is utterly relevant to today's world; it's truthful about what hurts, and so it's utterly kind. When people forget the Bible, they fall for all kinds of lies and errors. The Bible protects us. Ephesians 4:11-14 says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. And as a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." Jesus first gave apostles and prophets and then the written word to teach us the truth and to protect us from the devil's schemes.

The Bible provides an infallible standard of truth and righteousness. It teaches everything necessary to know for salvation and eternal life. It distinguishes truth from error, right from wrong, and the devil likes to blend that truth with error to keep people from knowing God's will. If they don't know it, they can fall victim to his wicked schemes and end up in great misery. The Lord said through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge (God says), I will also reject you (that is Israel) from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6). When people fail to know God's will, the whole society suffers for it. Though Bibles are available everywhere, many have such little knowledge of God and the Bible that they don't even know when they have sinned.

Second, the devil would like to convince us that sin doesn't matter. Our culture sees almost nothing as sinful. They don't understand that sin ruins everything it touches. People live for the moment and for their own pleasures with little thought to the consequences of their choices. They forget God calls certain behaviors sinful, because He has seen the harm they do. When parents forget God and set ungodly examples for their children, children grow up as selfish and irresponsible. Some wonder why their lives are so miserable and so full of drama. They never consider it's because they've shut God out of their lives and they've shut His will completely from them. If you forget God day after day, you can expect misery to surround you. If you fail to spiritually train your children, you can expect the devil to teach them his ways.

When people quit reading their Bibles, quit going to church, and push God out of their lives, they're going to follow the ways of sin. The devil will rob them of their love, their faith, their consciences, and their hope. He'll enslave them to sin that hardens their heart and makes them evil. The Hebrew writer warns, "Take care, brethren (he's speaking to people who are Christians, to church members), Take care brethren that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13).



Recent polls reveal that Americans are moving more and more away from the teaching of Scripture. For instance, the devil loves to deceive people into believing that they don't have to believe in Jesus Christ. But the Lord Jesus said, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He (that is, the Messiah, the Son of God), you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Jesus isn't just another moral teacher or prophet. He's the one and only Son of God, and unless we believe in Him as the Christ, we'll die in our sins and be lost forever.

The devil has convinced people that God won't condemn them for sin, but the Bible says otherwise. Galatians 5:19-21 says, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." You can't live in sin and go to heaven. God will punish sin.

The devil loves to hide broken lives and broken homes that were destroyed by sin. He doesn't want you to see the reality of what sin will do. He loves to make sinful behavior "fashionable" and "acceptable." He'll tell you sin will make you feel good, will make you feel free, and make you look good in front of your friends. He'll make you think your pleasures will last forever. Of course, He's lying. His promises sound good but always fail. He'll tell you people don't look down on sin anymore. He'll make every excuse to keep you doing what he knows will cost you your soul.

God loves us, and it breaks His heart to punish people for their sins. God doesn't want to condemn us; He wants us to repent. But don't fall for the devil's lie that God won't punish sin. If we disobey Him, He will punish us. God told the Jews through the prophet Ezekiel, "'Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord God. 'Therefore, repent and live'" (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Third, the devil loves to plant doubt in our hearts. The devil would love nothing more than to destroy our faith in Christ. The devil knows that without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible describes faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:1-3). Faith assures us that what we hope for is true; we're convinced that God's Word is utterly trustworthy. God sees what we cannot see and knows what we cannot know. We must learn to trust Him and to be faithful.

Proverbs 3:5-8 urges us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body, And refreshment to your bones." Faith in God has proven itself for many, many centuries; but doubt leads only to foolishness and failure. Doubt leaves a person in confusion, chaos, and uncertainty. A person without faith in God has no basis for distinguishing truth from error or right from wrong. He must assume a standard that arises from his own reasoning, a

standard as flimsy as the passing of time. He can never be sure of anything, and he must live with hopelessness and an uncertain morality. Doubt makes people selfish; and a selfish world with selfish standards will inevitably lead to moral chaos and misery.

The devil wants to create doubt in what we believe. The Bible says, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). The devil will tamper with God's Word just enough to make it say what he wants it to say and what people want to hear. The devil deceives people by twisting God's will to fit the times and giving people his warped version of the truth.

If Satan can get us to doubt what God says, He can offer us his alternative. He causes doubt by suggesting God has cheated us out of happiness. Satan suggests the way to happiness comes from following his alternative way. The truth is that the devil just wants to enslave us with sin and steal your soul. So the devil loves to produce an "alternate" truth or an "alternative" lifestyle. He'll do everything he can to keep us from following God's will.

Fourth, we need to know that the devil hates, and slanders, and persecutes anyone who disagrees with him. The Lord Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. And if you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). The world hates Christians and the will of God because the Bible shows the error of their ungodly and worldly ways. Our culture punishes anyone who is brave enough to call sin "sin." But if we are faithful to God, we must still take notice of the consequences of sin. Please, please, don't be fooled by the devil. There is one last thing the devil will do to cause you to be lost. He'll tell you that you have plenty of time, time to repent, time to come to Jesus. The devil knows that if you put off repentance now, it will be even harder to change later. The devil will do anything to keep you from leaving the way of sin and following the way of Jesus Christ. The Lord's main message to every village where He went from place to place was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus never condoned or overlooked sin. He despised sin so much that He was willing to bear the cross to atone for our sins, so that we could be reconciled with God and live eternally. Have you considered how much Jesus suffered for you? He loved you enough to take the punishment for your sins.

You are either choosing to follow a liar, that's Satan, who schemes to rob you of your soul or to follow the One who loves you enough to tell you the truth and to forgive you. The first, Satan, will lead you to eternal punishment; while the Other will lead you to eternal life and joy. You can follow the truth or follow deception. You can follow morality or be enslaved to sin. You can follow your greatest friend or follow your greatest adversary. What will you do?

The blood of Jesus is applied to our souls when we're willing to put our trust in Him, repent of our sins, confess His name before others, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sin. The devil says you don't have to be baptized, but we must listen to what the Lord Jesus said. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). That is talking about baptism. You can't be saved unless you're born of water and the Spirit, and that happens when you are baptized. Won't you be baptized today?

## Doctrine Matters

You've probably heard the old saying, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Is that true? Today we will see why what we believe matters. The Lord Jesus valued what He had to say very, very highly. In fact, He said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Jesus said that when He returns in glory He will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of His teaching. This seems strange to many today who don't think it matters what you believe, but the Lord Jesus takes what we believe very seriously.

We live in a confused age that speaks of "your truth" and "my truth." Many today believe that all truth is relative and there are no absolute truths. In a postmodern society, truth isn't as important as getting along with people. If you disagree with your friend's beliefs, today's version of love dictates that you must unconditionally tolerate their beliefs as an alternate version of the truth. Some assume if you disagree with anyone about anything that you're mean-spirited. But is it loving to remain silent about the truth? Did Jesus remain silent about the truth?

Paul once asked, "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16). Paul knew the truth was necessary to have a right relationship with God and that a lie would cause them to be lost. Because he loved them, he wanted them to know the truth that would bless them, rather than believe a lie that would destroy them. Doctrine matters because the truth matters. Doctrine matters because hearing what the Lord God says matters. Are you listening?

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Galatians 1:6-9. "I am 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!"

The word doctrine simply means teaching. Many who don't like "doctrine" nevertheless want teaching from God. Here are some reasons why doctrine or teaching is very, very important. First, doctrine is necessary if you want to know God and know about God. To know God, we must listen closely to what He says. God gave us His Word in the Bible so that we may come to know Him. The Bible reveals God's history with mankind from the beginning and how God will deal with us at the end of time. It tells of His steadfast love towards those who love and obey Him, His providence for all our needs, and His utter holiness. The Bible reveals that He created all things and He rules over all things. From the Bible we learn that we're accountable to Him and His will and that we'll be in judgment before Him at the end of time.

What we believe matters because beliefs and doctrines have consequences. What we believe, what we tolerate, and what doctrines we demand determine our choices and the direction of our lives. When beliefs and doctrines change, our values and behaviors change. What we believe about God, about creation, about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, about sin, about salvation, about worship, and about the church matter because they affect our choices and our relationships with God and with other people. Have you taken time to examine your beliefs? Churches change when their beliefs change. The question is whether they are growing closer to God or moving farther away.

Some religious groups preach constant messages on positive mental attitudes and unconditional grace. Some never call people to forsake their sins. Some may like this kind of

preaching, but this change has devastated authentic Christianity. We've become a broken people, because we've stopped listening to the whole counsel of God. We've found teachers who preach what people want to hear. As Paul predicted in 2 Timothy 4:4, they have bought into myths and turned their ears away from the truth. Many have chosen to live as idolaters who design their own God rather than follow the God of the Bible. It's heartbreaking today that there are plenty of Bibles but so few who know the God of the Bible. If we don't know the doctrine of the Bible, we cannot follow the Lord Jesus who died for us.

Second, doctrine is utterly profitable to Christians. Paul told Timothy of the value of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:15-17. He said, "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Scripture gives us the foundational teaching that we need to follow God. It reproves us when we're deceived or sinful, so that we may correct ourselves. Then God's Word works in our lives to lead us out of ignorance and sin into the truth and into righteousness. The inspired Word also trains us for righteousness; it teaches us how to do every good work. God can transform our lives and turn us into people who bless everyone around us if we'll let Him, but we have to let Him.

Third, Jesus taught doctrine because He wanted us to know the truth. If we believe Jesus is the resurrected Son of God, and He is, what He teaches is true. To deny His doctrine or teaching is really to deny Him. We can't separate Christ from His teaching. Jesus once asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). If we want to go to heaven, then we must follow the teaching of Jesus.

Doctrine is necessary to know the truth and to distinguish the truth from error. The world is confused about the truth. Some think that there's no such thing as absolute truth; and others believe that each person can manufacture his own version of the truth. The Lord Jesus made two important statements about the truth in The Gospel According to John. First, He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus is indeed the truth, and He has revealed that truth to us. If we truly wish to know the truth, then we must listen to Jesus. Second, He told those Jews who believed in Him, that "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). It's only by abiding in the words of Jesus that we can know the truth, and only by abiding in His words can we truly be His disciples, and only by abiding in His words can we truly be free!

When people fail to know the truth in God's Word, the Bible, they easily fall for false teaching. The best way to protect ourselves from lies, myths, and falsehoods comes from knowing the Scripture. It's noble to examine the teaching that we hear carefully, to examine it very closely, and then to compare it with what the Bible says. In Acts 17:11 Luke said the Bereans "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." They listened intelligently; they didn't simply swallow whatever Paul preached. They checked him out. God considers it noble to examine, to evaluate, and to distinguish the truth from error, the right from wrong, and the Biblical from the human. For this reason 1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."



The chief priests and the scribes challenged Jesus often while He was teaching, and they wanted Him to answer the question, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" Jesus responded, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" Matthew 21:24-25. That's a great question to ask about any doctrine or practice. Does it come from God or from man? Many religions are filled with doctrines and practices that are human in origin, innovations. Christ never taught these doctrines or instructed His people to practice these things. What some people call Christian is actually foreign to Christ, but people don't know it because they've never taken time to examine their beliefs and practices in the Scriptures. Just because some church believes something or practices something doesn't mean that it came from heaven.

The Lord Jesus criticized the church at Thyatira because they didn't take action against a lady who taught falsehoods. The Lord Jesus said, "But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). The Lord condemned teaching evil! When people teach others to sin, they are teaching something that is evil. Thyatira tolerated Jezebel's teaching, and the Lord held that against them. When people teach false doctrines, they displease the Lord. When their false doctrines lead to sin, the Lord will hold that against them. This is why we must know the Lord's teachings well enough to distinguish truth from error.

The forces of evil have never been silent. Since the beginning, evil has always opposed the truth; it has always promoted falsehoods, always invented new doctrines and practices, and tried to advance human doctrines that lead people away from God. Satan is just that way. Evil teaches people to be selfish and unfeeling, to give into their desires and pleasures, to stop worrying about the future, and to resist making any judgments about anything. When people stop judging anything as right or wrong, they irresistibly start permitting what is wrong to fill their lives. When people resist knowing the doctrine of Christ, they fail to realize that the devil won't sit silent. He will take advantage of them and step in with lies and falsehoods.

Paul challenged Timothy, "I solemnly 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, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:1-4). The gospel of Christ reveals the way to righteousness, and the way to salvation, the way to truth, and the way to heaven. That's why we must preach the Word.

Someone says at this point, "Phil, don't you know that doctrine divides?" Let's think about this. Is it really doctrine that divides, or is it the heart of man in rebellion to the teaching of God? Galatians 5:20 lists rivalries, dissensions, and divisions as works of the flesh. Is God's Word guilty of causing sin? No! Division comes from selfish ambition, from jealousy and rebellion. From the beginning people have challenged God's ways and wanted their own. God's Word stands as good and right; and Satan will never be content to follow God but will deceive the unaware and lead people in rebellion to God.

Fourth, doctrine matters because what we believe determines how we live morally. Faith and morals are inseparably joined. What we believe about sin and what we recognize as sin affects our hearts and our conscience. Scripture teaches us what is right and what is wrong, but it also guards our souls. When people love and listen to the Lord, they will not accept or practice sinful ways. When people understand that they're created by God rather than an accident of evolution, they recognize a reason for morality. They realize their accountability is to a higher power. Doctrine helps people to distinguish right from wrong. Hebrews 5:14 speaks of those who are spiritually mature in the study of Scripture and how "because of practice they have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

In ancient times, the Israelites ceased to follow God and they ran after idols. Their idolatry led them into moral decay and gross immorality. They forgot the Word of God. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. And because you've rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." The moral and spiritual problems of our day come from rejecting God's way and from following our own ways. When people forsake God, they inevitably fall into the misery of sin and immorality.

Fifth, doctrine matters because hearing and obeying the teaching of Jesus affects our relationship to Him. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). If we ignore doctrine, how can we know what the Lord's commandments are? How can we demonstrate our love for Him? We cannot effectively love somebody that we don't know. Doctrine is essential to a loving relationship with God. Luke 8:19-21 says, "And His mother and brothers came to Him (that is, Jesus), and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.' But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'" Would the Lord call you one of His relatives?

The Lord Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall" (Matthew 7:24-27). Wisdom is hearing and doing what the Lord says. Foolishness is hearing but doing something else, something that isn't in His teaching. Will you be wise or will you be foolish?

One day we'll all give an account of ourselves to God. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God's Word will judge us one day. If this is true, shouldn't we know God's will and follow it?

To become a Christian believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, turn from sin which hurts and divides, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized or immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Now this is what God teaches. Wisdom says listen and do what God says. God's Word is simple and plain. Doctrine is important because it's Christ's doctrine; and Jesus is Lord.

## "Give Thanks"

This coming Thursday, many will tell what they're thankful for. Today we're going to see how counting your blessings will make a difference in your life. Psalm 19:9 says, "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether." Because God is good and righteous we can turn to His Word. We can be assured that God's Word will teach us the truths we most need to hear; how to be His people, and show to prosper. I'm thankful God loves us so much and blesses us every day.

Psalm 92:1-2 says, "It's good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to His name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness by night." During the Thanksgiving holiday, we remember our blessings and express our thanks to God for them. Thanks should be on our lips every day. We can never say thank you enough to family, friends, and especially to God. Thanksgiving is not just something that we do to be kind; it also blesses us. When thanksgiving becomes an integral part of your life, you'll find that your attitude and your life change. You'll become more positive, gracious, loving, and humble.

We're all utterly dependent for life upon the God who created us. He provides all our needs. The fine tuning of our universe which allows us to breathe, to have fresh water, to have food, and to have night and day is not an accident. God made this world for our blessing. We need to honor God for all that He has done and to be thankful. The act of giving thanks leads to healthy hearts, minds, and lives. Giving thanks will also lead us to take God and His ways seriously. Nothing is more important!

Our reading today is Psalm 100, a Psalm of thanksgiving. "Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth. Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations." That's from God's inspired word. Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful for Your love and for the words that You give us. Help us to be thankful for everything You do for us. And may we do Your will on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

God has always urged His people to be thankful. Paul encouraged the church in Colossians 4:2 to "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." He had already given the reason for this; it's because of what the Lord Jesus has done. He said, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude" (Colossians 2:6-7). Walk as you were instructed and overflow with gratitude. Do this and it will make your life brighter and better. You'll be right with God and it will fill your life with joy.

The Christian life should overflow with gratitude. How do we do this? Colossians 3:15-17 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Let Christ's peace be your focus, sing with thankfulness in your heart, and do everything in His name while giving thanks. These changes

will lift your spirits; they'll encourage your heart. Your focus determines your attitude and your destiny. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him (that is, 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."

It takes discipline to keep focusing our minds on God. Life is ever changing, distracting, and often unfair. Our changing world is declining fast in morality and faith. We may even think all is lost. We can't predict what misfortunes may lie ahead, but we can count the blessings we now enjoy with confidence. We can remember that we are victorious in Christ. We can be certain that God will keep His promises for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

We must follow God's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, "pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." In everything? Yes, in everything. In good times and in bad, give thanks. When life is unfair, give thanks for what you have in Christ. Even if you suffer for the name of Christ, give thanks! First Peter 4:12-14 says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you're reviled (that is, spoken evil against) for the name of Christ, you're blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." The "here and now" isn't everything; the Lord will reward those who love and serve Him.

Our struggles in this life prepare us for something better, so be thankful even for struggles. James 1:2-4 counsels us, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." God is shaping and molding us for eternity, so don't despair when you face a struggle. Learn to be thankful for everything. Why?

First, when you're thankful you'll stop complaining and grumbling. Throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled against God. God counted their grumbling as a lack of trust. First Corinthians 10 regards grumbling as great a sin as idolatry or immorality. Philippians 2:14-16 says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I didn't run in vain nor toil in vain." When you complain, you take your focus off of what good the Lord has done for you. Don't do that.

Second, when you're thankful you'll stop worrying so much. Philippians 4:4-7 says, "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." When we rejoice in the Lord and when we take our burdens and cares to Him, He blesses us with peace. He'll put a guard around our hearts and minds! The Lord truly gives us an abundant life.

Start rejoicing over the things that God has done for you and life will grow more positive and joyful. Proverbs 15:30 says, "Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones." Count your blessings, focus on the good, and rejoice in Christ! Put away the negative and 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 be any excellence, if there be anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

Third, when you're thankful you'll become more humble and less prideful. Remember God is the source of every blessing. 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.” This is why the Lord asks us to pray to God, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). You may work a job and think it all depends on you, but remember God is at the source of every blessing.

Moses reminded the Israelites, as they were about to enter the promised land, “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am 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'll forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). Pride leads to forgetfulness. He urged them in verse 18, “But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” God is the source of all that we possess, all that we are, and all that we hope to be. First Corinthians 4:7 asks some arrogant people, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Some folks focus on themselves, their own abilities, and their own righteousness. When a person gives thanks to God merely for what he possesses within himself, he's actually bragging about himself more than thanking God. The Lord Jesus contrasted the arrogant person with the person who recognizes his utter need for God in Luke 18:11-14. He said, “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (Jesus said) I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Gratitude to God, a recognition for our utter need for God, removes our pride.

Fourth, when you're thankful you'll be willing to be more gracious to others. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Giving thanks for God's grace leads us to be willing to forgive other people. 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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Fifth, when you're thankful you'll express your love. We're thankful the Lord Jesus willingly and lovingly sacrificed Himself upon the cross. First John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.” Giving thanks helps you and me keep our focus on the Lord and on what really matters. Gratitude for what Jesus did is at the heart of our conversion. Gratitude leads us to be committed disciples who want to please the Lord in all we do. We cannot look deeply at the cross and walk away as if nothing matters. Our thankfulness will not let us.

Does the cross matter to you? Surprisingly, some people live as if the cross didn't matter. Perhaps you remember when Jesus healed the ten lepers. Luke 17:12-16 says, "As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' And when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan."

When people fail to remember God, or honor Him, or thank Him, they lose sight of the blessing of living as God's people. An ungrateful person will become apathetic and callous toward God. When people lose sight of God, they also lose sight of their morality and the truth. They don't realize that when they stop honoring God, they start dishonoring themselves.

Romans 1:21-24 described the pagan Gentiles this way: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them."

Giving thanks matters. When you love God, you want to serve Him with all your heart. Psalm 50:23 says, "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." Truly, giving thanks comes from our hearts and shows in our lives. Thanksgiving leads to thanks living. Are you thankful? Let's pray. Father, we're grateful for Your love and for all Your blessings. Help us everyday to do Your will on earth. In Jesus name, Amen!

More than anything else, I look forward to going to heaven and seeing Jesus. The first thing I want to do is to look into His eyes and say to Him "Thank you for dying for me. Thank you for shedding your blood to cleanse me from all my terrible sins, so that I could live with you." I don't have to wait till I go to heaven to express my thanks to God. I can do it now by getting right with Him and by worshiping Him. I don't want to miss a single Lord's Day, the first day of the week, without prayer and singing praise to Him. I don't want to miss a single Lord's Day without gathering around the Lord's table to partake of the Lord's Supper, remembering the Lord's body and blood which were given for me.

The word "thankful" actually comes from an old English word "think-ful." Being thankful comes from being think-ful. When we realize how blessed we are, we should respond to the love and goodness of God. How often people today want and want from God, but never think to give their praise, their thanks, or their hearts to Him. Have you?

Will you follow Jesus and serve the One who loves you? God's goodness leads us to repent and obey the gospel. If I love God and I'm thankful to Him for His grace, I'll gladly follow and obey Him. God's love makes us want to trust in Him, to repent of all our sins, to confess His name, and to be baptized into Christ. According to Romans 6:3-7, we die with Christ in baptism; we're buried with Him in baptism; and we're raised with Him to walk in newness of life in baptism. God wants you, your heart, your life, and your soul. Won't you serve Him and follow Him always. Thankfulness begins when people keep the Lord Jesus in their hearts everyday and serve Him. We hope you'll not wait another day to put your Lord on in baptism.

## Do You Believe?

When the Lord speaks in His Word, do you believe Him? Today we're going to see that believing God means believing what He says. We search the Scriptures for God's will because we know the Lord speaks the truth. We don't want to settle for anything less than the truth. The Lord's character, wisdom, and power reveal that He is worthy of our complete trust. Jesus is indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He came to bear witness to the truth. Let's trust in Him.

Solomon said, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil" (Proverbs 3:5-7). God asks us to trust Him with all our hearts. Trust means setting aside our own understanding and embracing what the Lord says. Our trust arises from our acknowledgment that God knows more than we do. He knows what we don't know and sees what we cannot see.

Mankind has always had a rebellious streak that wants to challenge God's teaching, His ways, and His morality. God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." But the serpent contradicted God and told Eve, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day that you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil." Eve believed the devil rather than God, she ate of the fruit and gave the fruit to Adam. In sin, Adam and Eve brought death and suffering to us to this very day. What and whom we believe matters.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel according to John 11:20-27. "Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; and he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.'" I hope that you believe that, too. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; and he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." At this point Jesus asks a question that we too should consider. Jesus asked, "Do you believe this?" Martha responded, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (John 11:25-26). Martha's answer reveals that her faith in His words and promises come from her belief in Him. To believe in Jesus Christ means we believe what He teaches is true. When you challenge what Jesus teaches is true, you're actually questioning whether He is the Son of God. You're saying He really isn't what He claimed to be.

Believing in Jesus Christ means trusting His wWord to be true, even when we may not understand the details or know how His promises will take place. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We don't know in detail how the Lord will raise the dead; but we do know that since God raised Jesus from the dead, we can trust in Him to raise us! Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Now I am asking you, "Do you believe the Lord Jesus will raise you up one day?" I hope you do.

Do you believe God created the world and created you? Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Believing God created you is different than believing that you're the result of evolution, or an accident of nature. What you believe will determine how you understand yourself and whether you'll take God's ways seriously. Do you believe?

When the time came for Jesus to come into the world, God sent the angel Gabriel to announce the birth to Joseph. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). All this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." Clearly Joseph believed because he took Mary to be his wife and raised the child.

Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. This means sin is your enemy and can cost you your soul, and we need saving from its threat. The Lord Jesus is indeed God with us. 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 personally, with His own body, endured being nailed to a cross to make a difference in our lives. The Lord Jesus was willing to shed His blood to give us life because He loves us so very much. Do you believe this, and does it matter to you? If you believe, you'll not see sin as some pleasure, but as a threat to your soul and your enemy.

When Jesus came to this world, He demonstrated His power by healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the blind to see, and making the deaf to hear. Jesus walked upon the water, stilled the storm, and fed the multitude from five loaves and two fish. The apostles recorded these miracles because they witnessed them. Jesus performed these miracles in the presence of large crowds. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, even the enemies of Jesus realized that He was from God. John 11:47-48 says, "Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs (that is, miracles). And if we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him.'" If the enemies of Jesus recognized His power, shouldn't you?

Jesus predicted that He would die and be raised again from the dead on the third day. In Matthew 20:18-19 he said, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, they will condemn Him to death, and they'll hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." This is a rather remarkable prediction, one that alarmed and saddened His disciples. Predicting that He will die is not hard, but predicting that He will come back alive and on the third day, that specific day, is something else again. Only God could make this happen.

When Jesus arose from the dead, Acts 1:3 reports that "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." The New Testament records twelve appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. First Corinthians 15:6 says He appeared to more than five hundred at one time. The bold apostles, who were eyewitnesses, were willing to suffer and die for telling this truth that they knew. Do you believe?



Jesus promised to send forth prophets, wise men, and scribes (Matthew 23:34). He promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and would bring to their remembrance all that He said (John 14:26). Jesus promised the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Because Jesus arose from the dead and His Word proved true, we can trust the Lord and we can trust the Scriptures that came through the Spirit. For this reason we can clearly declare that the Bible is true, God-breathed, and utterly trustworthy. We can trust every word of every sentence of every verse of every chapter of every book.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build His church, and His church uniquely belonged to Him. According to Acts 20:28, the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood to purchase the church. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul says that Jesus is the head of the church, which is His body. When we obey the gospel and we're saved, the Lord adds us to His church; the Lord washes away our sins; and the Lord causes us to be born again as children of God. To be a member of the Lord's church brings us great blessings. Some think you can be a good Christian and not be a member of any church, but to be "in Christ" is to be in His church, which is His family, His body. The Lord distinguishes those who belong to Him from those who do not. Do you believe this?

The Lord Jesus taught how Christians are to worship in the New Testament. As Lord, His instructions are clear and simple. He teaches us to pray, to give of our means, to sing from the heart, to commune with Him in the Lord's Supper, and to hear His words recorded in Scripture. He expects His people to gather on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, the Lord's Day, to worship Him. If we believe His teaching, we'll follow His instructions. We'll not go beyond His teaching but will hold fast to what He wills.

Loving the Lord means wanting to please Him by worshiping in the way that He teaches instead of trying to please ourselves. Worshiping God doesn't mean entertaining ourselves. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." How can anyone truly believe in the Lord Jesus and not want to praise and thank Him for all that He has done, and to do it in a way that pleases Him?

Do you believe the promise of Jesus that He's coming again? The Lord Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; and 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 14:2-3). When Jesus comes again, He's coming for His own. Every faithful member of the church is one of His own, and He has a place prepared just for them. Is He coming again for you?

Hebrews 9:27 says, "it's appointed for men once to die, and after this comes judgment." Everyone of us has a soul, and our souls are accountable to God. Each one will give an account for how he has lived and will spend eternity somewhere. One day Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the unrighteous. The sheep will go to a place that is blessed, wonderful, and comforting. The goats will go to a place that is regrettable and harsh. There's a difference! Do you believe this? Are you right with God?

It's not enough to say, "Well I believe," if you are unwilling to live out your faith. James taught, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says that he has faith but he doesn't have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the

things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:14-19). Dead faith talks, but living faith acts.

Again James taught, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and then he goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (James 1:22-25).

Trusting the Lord means yielding to Jesus' authority over our lives. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). We believe in Him not ourselves; Jesus is our Lord. The Lord is worthy of our trust and our obedience because He is all powerful, all-loving, and keeps His promises. He's worthy of our commitment because He committed Himself to us in love. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). We show our devotion by trusting and obeying Him. We can do no less.

Trusting Him matters because it means putting ourselves into His hands in good times and in bad. In his last letter, when Paul was in prison and he was about to die, he said, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Have you entrusted yourself to God? Have you lived for Him? Have you loved Him with all your heart, soul, and mind? If you believe, you will live for the Lord. Do you believe?

I don't believe in a leap of faith, but I believe in resting our faith upon evidence. We've talked today and other days about the solid evidence that Jesus arose from the dead and truly is the Christ, the Son of God. The Lord Jesus is worthy of our trust! If you trust the Lord, there's something you should also consider. The Lord believes in you! God believed in you enough to send Jesus Christ to make a difference in your life. Jesus was willing to bear the agony of the cross; and He did it out of love for you. He believed His sacrifice for your sins would turn your heart so that you would love Him. Can He trust you to take up your cross and follow Him?

To love Jesus means we will obey His commandments. You must believe Him and believe in Him because without faith it's impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Following Christ means repenting of your sins. Turn from everything sinful and that's offensive to God and turn to what's right and what pleases the Lord. This is an act of repentance and of trust and love. When you confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and you're baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, that's also an act of faith and trust.

Being baptized is an act of faith in the working of God. Colossians 2:12-13 says, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the un-circumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, that is, with Jesus, having forgiven us all our transgressions." When we're baptized we demonstrate our faith in what Jesus did at the cross to forgive us and what God did in raising Jesus from the dead to give us newness of life. God saves us when we act by faith in being baptized into Christ. Do you believe? If you do, be obedient today.