

# *Program Transcripts*

For January 2015



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**January 2015**

## **JANUARY 4 – HOW GOD SEES SIN**

It's not enough simply to believe in Christ; we must live our faith. God expects us to practice our faith, and He judges whether we believe by whether we live out our faith and obey His will.

## **JANUARY 11 – GOD UNDERSTANDS**

Do you ever feel alone and as if no one in the world understands how you feel? You may be going through a difficult time and feel misunderstood by everyone, but Jesus knows and understands.

## **JANUARY 18 – DID GOD MAKE ME SINFUL?**

Many people think God made them the way they are and they cannot change. Did God make people inherently sinful? Do people have the capacity to change? In this study we'll explore how God made us free moral agents.

## **JANUARY 25 – FORGIVING YOURSELF**

Many Christians feel the nagging sting of shame and guilt. They still worry over sins long forgiven by God, but they do not know how to forgive themselves of their transgressions and iniquities.

## How God Sees Sin

For many the subject of sin is dead, but God doesn't see sin the way we do. Today we're going to think about how God sees sin. Today marks the beginning of my seventh year at In Search of the Lord's Way. I've enjoyed travelling across the country to meet many of you who watch this program faithfully. I'm so grateful for your prayers and kind words. God is continuing to open up doors for the Word to us, and we're grateful for the opportunity to be on WGN America and many new broadcast stations. We take this time each week because we love the Lord and we love you. We realize the most important need of our day is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we're committed to preaching the truth in love.

The topic for our study today is sin. Everyone who reaches the age of accountability eventually sins. Romans 3:23 simply says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." First John 1:8 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Verse ten says, "If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him (that is Jesus) a liar, and His word is not in us." Every one of us must face the reality of our sins. If we ignore our sins, we'll only cause ourselves great grief in this life and in the life to come.

Not everyone takes sin against God seriously. Thirteen percent of Americans say there is no such thing as sin. Nearly forty percent of Americans think sin is an obsolete word. Many today simply don't know sinful behavior is wrong and could cause them to be lost eternally. The wages of sin is still spiritual death. Though society thinks differently, God hasn't changed His mind.

Our reading today is a Psalm of David, Psalm 32:1-5. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away, Through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." People have always thought the concept of sin should be softened. People today don't talk about sin because they don't like making judgments. Some think the words "sin" and "sinner" are outdated and uncouth; but the Bible uses the word "sin" and its synonyms – "iniquity," "transgression," "wickedness," or "error" – hundreds of times. While we don't like to talk about it, sin still exists. So we ask, "how does God see sin?" God created us; He's our heavenly Father. We need to know what He thinks. The Lord often sees things differently than we do. He will not excuse or dismiss the errors of our lives so quickly. If God sent Jesus to die for "sin," He must take it very seriously. Let's not be too quick to dismiss the concept of sin because God hasn't.

You can only find someone saying, "I have sinned," a few times in the Bible; yet Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." People don't like being called or being considered "sinners." They call their sin a mistake, an error in judgment, a disappointment, an inappropriate act, a problem, a disease, or an addiction. They think of it as anything but sin. We would rather downplay sin or act like it never happened.

Others take a different approach. They blame society, parents, or circumstances for their sins so they don't have to be responsible. Adam, after he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, blamed Eve. Adam said, "The woman whom You gave to be

with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12). Verse 13 says: “Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’” Both Adam and Eve pointed to someone else, but God didn’t accept their excuses. That very day they were forced out of the garden. Blaming others for our sins doesn’t work.

In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel told Saul to go strike the Amalekites, destroy every person and all they possess. Saul, however, saved King Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen for the people to sacrifice. Saul knew that he had not kept the command of God, but he was weak to the pressure of the people. Samuel asked Saul, “Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” Then Saul said to Samuel, “I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.” Saul gave in to the pressure and he blamed the people.

What Samuel said to Saul ought to instruct us about how God sees things. Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

God has never accepted the excuse of blaming other people. Romans 14:12 says, “So each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” Regardless of what others do, say, or think, we are responsible for ourselves. We must take responsibility for our words, attitudes, and behavior. We cannot disobey God and blame others. God always knows who is responsible.

When blaming doesn’t work, people tend to rationalize away their sin. We often hear phrases like, “Just once won't hurt”; or “Everyone's doing it”; or “I can quit when I want to”; or “Times have changed! People don’t think that way now!” I have a book in my library subtitled, “37 Ways Not to Handle Guilt.” It tells of all the ways people try to justify their sins. The book says clearly not one of these 37 ways works. Some try to change the morals and teaching of the Bible; they make rules for themselves and imagine God will approve.

Some think God is subject to a vote or to opinion polls. God’s will doesn’t change with the times. Some react to the firmness of God by getting angry. It is easy to get angry at God; it is easier to do that than it is to repent. People get angry and charge God with being unfair or unloving to call their behaviors sin, but God is no fool. God knows how sin hurts. He opposes sin because it ruins lives and families. When God makes a law, it is always for the good of His people. When people violate that law they end up hurting themselves or others. It is arrogant to think that we know more about right and wrong than God does. God has witnessed the cruelties and heartaches of sin for thousands of years.

People lie to themselves about their sin! They don’t realize how sin can deceive, enslave, and harden them. Hebrews 3:12-13 says, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it’s called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Some criticize and condemn other people's sins but they ignore their own. They forget God sees their sins, too. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

Other people deceive themselves by thinking they won't be tempted to sin. Many years ago a man who had quit drinking told my father he could walk into a bar and never take a drink. It didn't matter that others were drinking or that he would smell the liquor; he was sure that he could stay sober. My dad told him, "You can't walk through the mud and not get muddy." The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Associating with evil will corrupt you even if you have the best of intentions.

Sin always hurts. It damages us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Galatians 5:19-21 says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Sometimes the pain is physical as with assault, or rape, or murder. Some damage themselves by their sins; that is, their heart and their minds and their bodies. Drunkenness and drug abuse have killed and ruined more than a few lives. Many diseases come from sexual immorality. A man who commits violent crimes opens himself up to violence or imprisonment. Sometimes the pain is emotional. Broken homes hurt everyone. The compulsive gambler may bankrupt his family. The liar will find that no one trusts him or her. People will avoid the gossip and the complainer; they don't want to be around him, they don't want to hear it. One cannot escape the pain, the guilt, and the regret of sinful behavior.

God simply doesn't look on sin the way that we do. What seems insignificant to us isn't insignificant to God. Perhaps you remember Uzzah who tried to steady the Ark of the Covenant when it was in the oxcart, and the Ark nearly upset. God struck him dead. People wonder why? Didn't Uzzah have good intentions? The priests were to carry the Ark in a prescribed manner, not on the oxcart. Uzzah was never to touch it. This may seem insignificant to us, but it was irreverent and very offensive to God according to 2 Samuel 6:7.

Why is God offended? If we're the victim of a crime, we see that crime differently than the one who committed the crime. How would you feel if someone robbed you at gunpoint? The robber may laugh, but you aren't laughing. He's pointing the gun at you. He's stealing your money and threatening your life. That makes this matter incredibly dangerous and offensive!

We have to understand every sin that we commit is also a crime against God. If you sin against your brother, you also sin against God. John said, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21). How we treat people is how we treat God. This is why all sin is offensive to and a crime against God.

God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and

keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:3-6). Some think God has no feelings, but God grieves when we sin. It breaks His heart.

God created us, and He won't give us up to an idol or to serve Satan. God is jealous in the sense that is positive, in the sense of being unwilling to share what is rightfully His. I feel the same way about my loving wife. I won't share her with anyone. Sin separates us from God. We shouldn't be surprised that God despises sin, because sin robs Him of the people that He loves. God often calls sin an abomination. Solomon said, “There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19). Yes, God hates sin!

Sin ultimately destroys us. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Death is a separation. In physical death our bodies are separated from our spirits. Spiritual death takes place when we are separated from the love and the grace of God. Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor is His ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2). Our sin will separate God from us, and it is a barrier that blocks our prayers and will cause us to be lost eternally.

When it comes to right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral, the Lord will have the last word, and the only word. What He says will last to eternity. We may like what theologians, church leaders, opinion polls, or our society thinks is right and wrong; but the Lord Jesus has the last word and the only word that counts in eternity. Will you listen to Him?

We all commit sin that offends God; but because God is rich in love, mercy and grace, He makes His forgiveness available to us. He loved us by sacrificing His son Jesus for our sins. God knew how sin would destroy our lives here on earth and would keep us out of heaven, so Jesus bore the punishment for our sins so that we could die to sin and live for righteousness. God doesn't want us to continue in sin, but to turn from wickedness and live Godly lives. Punishing people for their sins grieves the Lord. Ezekiel 33:11 says, “As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

God has always called people to repentance. The opportunity to repent is a great gift that blesses everyone. Repentance means that we can change our lives. That we don't have to be trapped in sin but can become people who live for righteousness. Don't ever let anybody tell you that you cannot change; of course, you can! God can and will help you change. God didn't create you for sin; He created you for righteousness. First Timothy 2:4 says God wants you “to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Will you come to the Lord?

To become a Christian, believe in the Lord Jesus, repent of every sin and turn to the Lord, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water. Philip baptized the Eunuch in water (Acts 8:38); and Saul of Tarsus was told in Acts 22:16 to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Won't you respond today to be saved from sin?

## God Understands

Do you ever feel alone and as if no one in the whole world understands how you feel? Today we're going to find the One who understands and loves us. Of all our blessings nothing is more valuable than having a close, loving, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that He loves us makes us want to love Him all the more. Knowing that His teaching and His commandments are for our good makes us want to keep His commandments. The Bible provides the wisdom to give us the best kind of life on earth and to give us the hope of heaven. Don't let a day go by without studying the Bible.

Perhaps you remember the famous atheist, Madeline Murray O'Hare. Her diaries were auctioned off several years ago. When they were read, it was found emphasized in her journals three times the words: "Will somebody, somewhere, please love me?" Many face this kind of loneliness and longing to be understood and loved. Without God in our lives we often feel alienated and alone. With God we can know that we're loved, wanted, and never alone. The last words of the Lord Jesus were, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). God promises us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

With God we have a purpose in life, a peace that passes understanding, a joy inexpressible, and a living hope. With God we have found a love that never ends and never fails. Because Jesus came to this earth, He understands us with all our weaknesses and imperfections. Jesus came to save us from the things that will destroy us. We need Him in our lives more than ever. Do you have the Lord Jesus in your life? Oh, don't miss out on loving your very best friend.

Our reading today is a Psalm of David, Psalm 139:1-6. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it." That's a tremendous relationship between David and the Father. I hope you have one like that. Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful that You love us and You understand us, and You know so much about us. Father, help us to love You and to want to serve You in a way that pleases You. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

A farmer had just relaxed on the front porch when a newsboy delivered the evening paper. The boy noted the sign, "Puppies for Sale." The boy got off his bicycle and said to the farmer, "How much for a puppy, mister?" "Twenty-five dollars, son." And the boy's face dropped, since he had very little money. "Sir, could I at least see them?"

The farmer whistled, and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house followed by four cute puppies, wagging their tails and yipping with joy. A little later another puppy came straggling around the house, dragging a hind leg. "What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked. "Well son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to a vet and the doctor took an X-ray, and she doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right." The boy dropped the bike, reached for his collection bag and took out a fifty-cent piece. "Mister," the boy said, "Please, I want to buy that puppy. I'll pay you fifty cents every week until the 25 dollars is paid. Honest I will, Mister."

The farmer replied, "But son, you don't seem to understand. That puppy will never, never be able to run or jump. That puppy is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want puppy like that?" The boy paused for a moment, and then he reached down and he pulled up his pant leg, exposing that all too familiar iron brace and leather knee strap, holding a poor, twisted leg. The boy said, "Mister, that puppy is going to need someone who understands him and loves him."

Perhaps at times you wished someone, just anyone would understand and love you with all your faults and troubles. There's someone who does! He understands you and will always love you. You may be crippled inside or outside, but He understands. You may be tempted, but He understands. You may have it hard and feel like giving up, but He understands. You may have been hurt and have reason to be angry. He understands. He knows all about you. He knows what you've been through. He knows how you think. He knows what you've done. He knows all your victories and all your failures. He understands and loves you in spite of it all. Who am I talking about? Jesus, of course!

The Bible says, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Jesus experienced, in his short life, all the struggles and temptations that we face. He knows what it is to be human, and he also knows what it is to be Divine. He knows what it is to suffer and to be tempted, and He knows what it is to do what is right even when things are utterly difficult.

The Bible says that Jesus, "knew all people and He needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25). As a human, Jesus knew what it was like to be hungry and thirsty. Matthew 4:2 says, "And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." While hanging on the cross, Jesus, "knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture, 'I thirst.'" We also know that Jesus grew weary at times. In John 4:5-6, the Bible says, "So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. And it was about the sixth hour." Jesus never had a wife, never had any children. His father likely died before his ministry began, leaving him with a mother and several siblings to support. He had a hard life as an itinerant preacher. He was popular to some and hated by others. He never owned a home; He walked everywhere he went; and He knew what it was like to be rejected.

Can you imagine, from the time of your birth people thinking you were illegitimate? Can you imagine the soldiers of King Herod the Great hunting for you to take your life? The Bible says, "Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men" (Matthew 2:16).

Can you imagine your family thinking that you were crazy? The Bible says, "And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:21). Can you imagine your own family and friends refusing to believe you? John 1:11 says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." The people of his hometown, Nazareth, rejected him and even tried to kill him. Mark 6:2-6 records this: "And on the Sabbath



he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get these things? And what is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.' And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief."

Can you imagine your disciple and friend selling you out? The Bible says, "Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:14-16). Can you imagine being betrayed with a kiss?

Can you imagine your close friend and disciple lying about knowing you? The Bible describes the boast of Peter: "and Peter answered him, 'Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.' But Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter said to him, 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!' And all the disciples said the same" (Matthew 26:33-35). But when the pressure came upon them, they did fall away. Peter denied him not once, not twice, but three times; and the last time in the very presence of Jesus.

Can you imagine being asked by your father to be crucified? The Heavenly Father sent His Son into this world to sacrifice Himself as an act of love and to deliver us from our sins. It was most difficult for Jesus to face the cross. In Matthew 26:38 Jesus said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to the point of death." The Bible describes His prayer in the garden this way: "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:42).

Can you imagine dying on the cross, bruised and bleeding, while the people around you are mocking you? Matthew 27:41-43 says: "So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said', 'I am the Son of God.'" Can you imagine remaining silent during all their ugly mockery? Can you imagine being in excruciating pain at the hands of very wicked men and never striking back? First Peter 2:23 says, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him who judges justly."

Jesus understands the good and the bad, the easy and the hard, the fair and the unfair. He knows people and He knows churches. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus said to each of the seven churches of Asia, "I know your works." He knew the positive and the negative. He praised them for the good and rebuked them for the evil. He praised them for their toil, and their perseverance, their sound doctrine, their faithfulness in tribulation, their willingness to suffer poverty and even blasphemy for the name of Christ, and for how they lived, how they showed their love, their faith, and their service to the Lord. But He also rebuked them when they left their first love, when they compromised, when they claimed to be alive but had died, and when

they were distastefully lukewarm. Jesus knows about your spiritual life, whether you are growing or dying or lukewarm.

Jesus knows when you're tempted and when life has caved in on you. I love God's faithful promise: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). God understands your limits and he will not let temptation and trials so overwhelm you that you cannot endure them. When you cannot stand the temptation, the Lord will make a way of escape so that you don't fall into sin. He'll bless you and help you. He promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). The God who understands also stands by us to help us through all our struggles.

He knows your victories and your defeats. He also knows your heart. If you love Jesus, He knows it. If you have forgotten Him, He also knows it. If you've let sin come into your life and overcome you, He knows it. In spite of all He loves us anyway. He loves us even in our sins and weaknesses. He still wants us to draw close to Him. To the lukewarm church at Laodicea, the Lord and Savior Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus wants a relationship with you. He wants to be your friend. He took the first step in building that relationship by offering to you and me his love and grace. No matter who you are or what you have done in the past, the Lord's heart is big enough and open enough to forgive you and welcome you into his family, if you are willing to come to him. Won't you come to Jesus today? Let's pray together. Father, we pray that each one will come to understand the love and compassion that You, our Father, have for us. And help us to love Jesus and to serve Him. May Your will be done on earth as it is heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Some think, "God couldn't possibly want me to follow Him." The Lord God created you and loves you. God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4); and He wants to save you. God sent Jesus into the world to save us from our sins. Yes, sin will cause us to be lost; but God gives us an answer to our problem with sin in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Saul of Tarsus was the chief of sinners, but Christ could still save him. The apostle Paul, that is Saul of Tarsus, said, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). I tell you, if God could forgive Saul of Tarsus, He can forgive you, too!

Won't you come to him? Why not let God into your life? Demonstrate your faith and love by repenting of your sins, confessing Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, and by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. The Lord wants you to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:5); and this means being baptized. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Why not become a child of God today? Don't let another day go by without God in your life. No one understands you and loves you more. You'll never make a better decision than to follow Jesus Christ.

## Did God Make Me Sinful?

Some think that God made us the way we are and we can't change. Did God make us sinful? Can we change? The Bible answers these questions and gives us hope. Occasionally people who are struggling with a moral problem ask, "Did God make me this way?" Many people are convinced that our DNA makes us the way we are and we can't change our behavior. Others believe that man is incapable of change on his own. Flip Wilson used to say, "The Devil made me do it"; but some people, instead of blaming the devil, blame God for making them do the things they do. They believe we're all born sinners, totally depraved, and completely unable to choose what is good. They say our sinful nature is utterly incapable of choosing or even desiring God. They go even farther by saying some people are predestined to be lost, while others are predestined to be saved. They believe God arbitrarily makes the choice for us, and we have no freewill. They say we can't change our ways or our eternal destiny.

Without a doubt all people struggle with temptation and sin throughout their lives. What tempts you may differ from what tempts me, but we both face the struggle to live righteously. The apostle Peter urged Christians to "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Did God make us sinful and unable to resist temptation? Are we trapped in sin with no hope of salvation? What can we do? We'll look into the Scriptures because they contain the words of eternal life. They have the answer to our problems.

Our reading today comes from the inspired prophet Ezekiel 18:1-4. "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel', saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'? 'As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.'" That's God speaking through Ezekiel. Let's pray together. Father, we pray that You will help us to understand our nature and to serve You and to do Your will always on earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

The Scriptures teach that man is capable of choosing between good and evil, and he is free to choose between God and Satan. Romans 6:17-18 says, "Though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were committed. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." This passage clearly teaches that a lost person obeyed from his heart the gospel teaching and changed from being a slave to sin to being a slave of righteousness.

After preaching to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost about their sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ and their need to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, the apostle Peter, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, said, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). What does that mean, "Save yourselves"? Are we suggesting that a person can earn his way to heaven? No. We're not saying that. We're saying a person must respond to God's gracious gift. God does the saving, but He puts qualifications on who can be saved. We must respond to His gift. One must repent and be baptized out of faith and love to meet God's conditions.

The Bible says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of

God” (1 Peter 1:22-23). People purify their souls when they hear and obey the gospel truth. They’re born again, not through some miraculous movement of God but by obedience to the preaching of the Word of God. It’s the gospel that saves (Romans 1:16). Paul said, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). This was God’s choice of how to save people, giving them a gospel and saving them through that message.

That man has freewill either to accept the gospel or to reject it is also clear in the Scriptures. Have you thought about that golden passage that you learned as a child? The Lord Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Whoever” means “anyone.” God will save people who believe, but those who refuse to believe shall perish. Our choices matter; we can freely choose. John the Baptist later said in verse 36 in the same chapter, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever does not obey the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” Faith and obedience matter to our salvation. God expects us to choose to believe and obey in order to have eternal life.

Throughout history, people have chosen whether they will obey God or not. Joshua, late in life, addressed the people of Israel. “Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it’s disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15). Joshua knew that people had to choose which god they would serve, whether the God of Heaven or some other god. They had freewill.

Many years later the prophet Elijah stood against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah on Mount Carmel. The God of Heaven completely overcame the prophets of Baal when the fire came down and consumed Elijah’s sacrifice. Before the challenge in 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” Of course, Baal was just an idol and was never anything but a figment of the people’s imagination. The God of Heaven, however, was real and sent fire down from heaven, which convinced the people to kill the prophets of Baal. When the people saw the evidence, they chose God and rejected Baal.

They had freewill. So do you! Revelation 22:17 says, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” God invites us to believe and to obey!

Let’s reason together. Jesus said, “unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:5). Why would Jesus Christ condemn people for a failure to repent if they’re incapable of repenting or doing any good toward their own salvation? Wouldn’t that make God into a monster?

Hebrews 11:6 says, “without faith it’s impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Why would God demand faith from us if He knows that people are incapable of believing? We humans are capable of believing! God won’t require of us something that we’re not capable of doing.

The apostle Paul encouraged people to “be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Why would God ask men to be reconciled if they weren’t capable of doing anything by which

they could be reconciled? Let's think together. The word "reconcile" implies that there is a separation and a reunion; reconciliation means "to bring back into harmony." A reconciled husband and wife were once in harmony, then they separated, and then later that harmony was restored. If an infant is born in sin, he cannot be reconciled because he was never in harmony with the Lord at the beginning. Infants aren't born in sin but born pure; they separate from God when they're old enough and responsible enough to sin on their own. They are reconciled to God by faith and obedience to the gospel. In obedience to the gospel one is freed from sin and born again into the family of God.

The Bible teaches that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11-12; and 1 Peter 1:17). God hasn't arbitrarily chosen some folks to be saved and others to be lost, as some people teach. Rather the blood of Jesus was shed for all people and the gospel is offered to everyone. The apostle Paul said that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). God didn't make people just to condemn them. That is a false and cruel doctrine. The apostle Peter said, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3: 9). That is what God wants, for you to repent and to be right with Him and live with Him forever.

If we have no choice as to our eternal destiny, why would we need to beware of the devil? The apostle Peter warned, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Such language is absurd if we have no freewill. Temptation tests whether we will choose to do right or give in to what's wrong. That's freewill. We are not puppets or robots; we're made in God's image and God made us a free moral agent.

The Bible says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:13-15). God is not the source of our sinful behavior. He tests our faith, but doesn't lead us into moral failure and sin. How could a holy God lead anyone into behavior that totally contradicts His own nature? God doesn't create someone for a sinful life.

We do admit that man is often weak to sin, but being weak to sin isn't the same thing as being incapable of resisting sin. Many Bible characters resisted the temptation to sin. Joseph said "no" to the continual pressures of Potiphar's wife. Joshua said "no" to serving false gods. Daniel as a young man said "no" to eating the unlawful foods at the Babylonian king's table. As an old man, Daniel said "no" to the law that forbade him to pray to the God of heaven. When the Sanhedrin told Peter and John not to preach the name of Jesus, they said, "Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). The apostles chose the moral high ground rather than give into the Council. People can choose what they do.

The Lord Jesus describes the nature of man in Matthew 26:41. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane with his three disciples: Peter, James, and John. He was praying in agony, and they kept falling asleep. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." When Jesus says a man is indeed willing, it shows that man does have some good inclinations within. He is not all bad. We all face

weakness to sin. This is why we must be alert and pray, so that we can overcome the temptation. Jesus didn't accept the notion that men must give in to the flesh. We can resist temptation, and we can repent of our past sins.

Some people think there's something in their physical makeup that makes their character inherently sinful. Some speak of people being born alcoholics or born drug addicts. Others think that our sexual orientation is determined and cannot be changed. But millions of alcoholics have given up drinking altogether. Millions have repented of sexual misdeeds in order to live a godly life. Sin is a learned behavior, not a foregone conclusion. The hope of the gospel is that men can and will repent. Jesus died on the cross to give us that opportunity. The Bible always assumes that people can change their lives.

So don't let anyone deceive you. Refuse to accept any doctrine that says that you have no hope of changing your ways or of overcoming sin. God can and will help you overcome the sins of your life. You can repent, if you will, but you have to make up your mind that you want to serve God. Free will is yours, and you must make your choice firm. You have to decide what you love most. You have to give your heart to the Lord. Please choose to follow the Lord whatever the cost. I hope today that you have that desire in your heart. Follow Jesus and do it today. Let's pray together. Father, we're so thankful that You've given us freewill and that we can change our hearts and change our lives. And Father, may we always do Your will on this earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

At this point someone asks, "Well Phil, what about Psalm 51:5?" Psalm 51:5 is a penitential Psalm after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and in his agony and his guilt he says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Some say this passage teaches that we're born in sin. Does it really say that? David said that he was born into an evil and sinful world which is different from saying that he was born sinful. Sin is an act; it's a transgression of God's law according to 1 John 3:4. Sin isn't inherited; it's a learned behavior. For instance, a person learns English because he was born where they speak English. In Acts chapter 2 the apostles spoke miraculously in tongues to people from many nations. When they heard the apostles, they marveled and they said, "How is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" (Acts 2:7-8). How is one born into a language? One learns a language by being born into a place that speaks it. Likewise, one learns sin by being born into a world that practices sin.

David wasn't born totally depraved because this contradicts what he said in Psalm 22:9-10: "Yet you (that is God) brought me out of the womb; you make me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God." This isn't a baby born in sin but a baby born into a sinful world and yet still able to love God.

Sin is serious business. Unforgiven sin will cost you your soul. We need the blood of Jesus to be saved. How do we come into contact with that blood? We contact that blood by choosing to believe in Christ, choosing to repent of our sins, and by choosing to be baptized. When we're baptized into the death of Christ, we come into contact with His shed blood according to Romans 6:3. In baptism, God applies the blood of Jesus to our souls. That's the time that our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Be saved from this corrupt generation!

## Forgiving Yourself

Many Christians feel the sting of shame and guilt. They worry over sins long forgiven by God and cannot forgive themselves. In this study we're going to learn how to forgive ourselves. A troubled person once came to me with a serious problem. He said, "Years ago I committed a terrible sin. I'm so ashamed that I can hardly talk about it. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself. I feel so dirty, as if I'll never be clean." He said, "I became a Christian a few years ago and it seemed to help. But, ever so often, I remember that sin and I feel lost all over again. I don't feel fit to be a Christian."

His problem wasn't God's ability to forgive the penitent believer, but in his ability to forgive himself. While God is very willing to forgive, some people fail to feel forgiven. People believe what they tell themselves, even if what they say is mistaken. A person who has never forgiven himself feels shame in his heart every day. When David sinned with Bathsheba he admitted it, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3).

David felt the hand of God upon him because of his sin. He said, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there's no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they're too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:3-4). Your sins may be too heavy for you too, but there is a God-given solution to a guilty conscience! There is an answer.

Our scripture reading today is a Psalm of David, Psalm 51:10-17. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

Galatians 6:7-8 reveals an undeniable truth: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Sin causes the worst heartaches of mankind. A person can't selfishly live to please his flesh and expect to find the blessing of God. Every sin is a terrible offense against God, but sin also harms the one who commits it. Sin is both an offense against God and against one's self. Proverbs 8:36 says, "But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death." When people transgress God's will they live with the sting of guilt and the reality that they could do such a thing.

The conscience is a God-given function of the heart. The conscience works as a moral monitor that praises us or condemns us. The Bible describes this function in Romans 2:14-15. God's Word says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

When a person sins, his conscience pricks his heart, causing him a lot of pain. This pricked conscience causes a person to be grieved at himself, and he can lose all respect for himself by

his sins. The prodigal son no longer felt worthy to be called the son of his father. You might think the conscience is a bad thing, but the prodigal son's conscience and the terrible effects of his sin were what brought him to his senses. God didn't give us a conscience to punish us, but to keep us from doing what is wrong and to encourage us to do what is right. When we fail to listen to our conscience, we end up hurting ourselves.

Everyone has a conscience, but not every conscience uses the Word of God as a basis for what is right and wrong. Many people sin against God and don't even know that what they did was wrong. They rely on their own experience or their own judgment rather than take the time to study the Scriptures and learn what God says about the matter.

Over time, sin begins to harden the conscience. The Bible warns, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it's called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). I worry far more about the person whose conscience is past feeling than the person who feels great sorrow for sin. When a person gets past feeling, it's not likely that he will want to repent. If a person sees no need to repent or won't repent, he won't get right with God.

Of all of God's blessings, nothing is more valuable than forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't the same as forgetting. Forgiveness is "forgetting against." When God forgives, He no longer counts our sins, or our transgressions against us (2 Corinthians 5:19). Yes, those sins happened; but they don't matter. God promised, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

David, by inspiration, wrote, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:10-12). When God forgives, He no longer thinks of us in terms of our past iniquities. He removed them from His mind, but He keeps us close to His heart. Forgiveness ends the shame and guilt by blotting out the offenses once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:24). Forgiveness puts to death the old man of sin (Romans 6:4-7) and it makes all things new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Let's learn from God about how to forgive. Forgiving yourself means that you will no longer hold your past sins against yourself, so you can find peace. If God can forgive you, and has forgiven you, then can't you forgive yourself.

Repentance always comes before forgiveness. You can't find healing from God until you correct your broken ways. If you haven't made a change in your heart and life, you'll find it hard to forgive yourself. You must repent. Many people seek forgiveness, but they don't change. You'll not find peace if you're unwilling to repent. If you commit the same old sins over and over, you'll keep on enduring the same old guilt and shame over and over.

The Bible says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. And in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you've put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:5-10).



There are four things that you can do to forgive yourself. First, be sure you've genuinely repented. Repentance is not only a turning away from sin; it's also a turning to and toward God. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). You'll have a hard time forgiving yourself if you fail to fill your life up with God.

The Lord Jesus taught, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. And then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. And then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and they dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation" (Matthew 12:43-45). If we fail to fill our lives with Christ, we'll fall victim once again to sinful ways.

Second, if you wish to forgive yourself, focus your attention on what you have become, not on what you were! The apostle Paul was guilty of a number of terrible sins before he became a Christian. He was guilty of violence, murder, slander, and blasphemy. He persecuted the church beyond measure and cast people into prison for their faith.

In 1 Timothy 1:12-16 Paul said, "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy, Paul says, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Paul couldn't change his past, but that was not his focus. Paul said he was "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). He focused on what God was doing in his life and what God wanted him to do. Knowing God's forgiveness, he could put his past behind and focus on the will of God. He could say, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

My favorite saying is this: "I'm not all I'm going to be; I'm not all I ought to be; but, thank God by His mercy and grace, I'm not what I used to be." God is more interested in what you are becoming in Christ than in what you used to be. You can't change the past, and it's not necessary for you to do so to forgive yourself. What you can do is change yourself and your attitude toward the past by becoming the person God wishes you to be.

Third, trust God rather than your feelings. Feelings represent perceptions, but they're not always true to reality. Feelings accurately reflect how we perceive things to be, but not always do they reflect reality. The brothers of Joseph sold him to some slave traders, and Joseph went to Egypt. The brothers, however, claimed a wild animal killed Joseph and they dipped his coat of many colors in blood. The brothers lied to their father, Jacob. Jacob tore his clothes in grief; he wore sackcloth and mourned for his son for many days. He refused to be comforted. Jacob said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol (that is, the grave) to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him (Genesis 37:35). Jacob thought Joseph was dead, but Joseph hadn't died. He was

very much alive. Jacob was mistaken. He believed the brothers' report but he didn't know the truth.

People often feel unforgiven, even when God promises to forgive, and that's in black and white in the Bible. So trust God, not your feelings. Trust the Bible to tell you the truth. God never lies. God can and will do what He has promised. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." But he also said, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). I like what Martin Luther wrote, "For feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; my warrant is the Word of God, Nothing else is worth believing."

Fourth, draw close to God. If you wish to be at peace with God, don't flirt with the sins of the world. The Bible says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you. Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:7-8). When God rules in your heart and your life, when you choose to draw near to God and you say no to the devil, you'll find your life growing better and better.

The Bible says, "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). It's the double-minded fellow who wants to be a friend to God on one side and a friend of the world on the other, but who never finds peace or assurance. If you want a clear conscience, "submit to God." When you draw close to God and you start resisting the devil, you'll find the strength to live a righteous and holy life. You'll find the things that tempted you aren't as appealing as they used to be. You can forgive yourself, and God can help you. Let Him help you find peace. Let's pray together. Father, we're so thankful that through Your mercy and grace and Your love, You give us Your forgiveness. Father, help us to find peace in what You have done for us. Father, help us to turn always from sin and to do Your will. And may we do it on this earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

People think they can get away with their sins, but there always are two who know we have sinned no matter how secret. God knows and we know. David thought he had hidden his sin with Bathsheba, but it wasn't hidden from his own heart. David said, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I didn't hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5).

God does indeed forgive us so that we might be able to forgive ourselves. When we get right with God, we find the grace that we need to get right with ourselves. Forgiveness takes place in the heart of God, and it is an act of mercy and grace—it's a gift. You can't earn it. Mercy takes place when God does something for us that we're not capable of doing for ourselves. So your salvation, your forgiveness, is the gift of God.

But you have to accept that gift from Him. That means being honest with yourself and honest with God in confessing the sin. To become a Christian, we must trust God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must turn from sin and turn to God; that's repentance. We must be willing to confess Jesus as Christ and Lord before others; and we must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins. Christian baptism is an immersion in water of a penitent believer. And if you need to do these things, why not contact a nearby church of Christ and get your heart right with God.