

# *Program Transcripts*

For July 2018



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**July 2018**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JULY 1 – FAITHFUL JESUS**

As a Son over His house, Jesus was faithful. In everything Jesus obeyed His Father's instructions. He never acted on His own authority but obeyed just as His Father commanded Him. He was faithful.

## **JULY 8 – FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS**

What does it mean to be faithful? Will being faithful make a difference on the judgment day? Will the Lord find us faithful when He comes again at the end of time? How does a faithful Christian act?

## **JULY 15 – UNITY IN CHRIST**

Churches throughout the United States are very divided in their beliefs, and there is a difference between churches. The only path to the unity for which Jesus prayed comes from following the Lord Jesus as He revealed the will of the Father in Scripture. When we all focus on the will of the Father, we see things alike. When we focus on our own will and desires, we go a thousand different ways.

## **JULY 22 – THE GOSPEL AND SALVATION**

How does God communicate salvation? Some say it's by a special feeling or a miraculous experience, but the Scriptures teach that God communicates salvation through the gospel. In this lesson we'll learn how God's message saves.

## **JULY 29 – HOW JESUS VIEWS SCRIPTURE**

In trying to understand the nature of Scripture, it is worthwhile and even necessary to examine how the Lord Jesus views the Sacred Writings. If we know how the Lord sees Scripture, it will help us to know how we should see it.

## Faithful Jesus

Who are your heroes? I treasure several men, but the greatest hero of all time is the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we're looking at what makes Jesus a hero! We have in Jesus our model and teacher. He lived a sinless life and sacrificed Himself so that we might have life and hope. We look to Him like no one else because He has no equal! He was the Son of God who revealed to us what God is like. We're grateful that we have a Savior who loved us enough to teach us the truth.

God calls us to follow the example of Jesus Christ. First Peter 2:21-24 says, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and 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 was willing to suffer death by crucifixion in order to bring us to God. His example of kindness toward those who were reviling and punishing Him calls us to be kind while we're suffering. His example of obedience to the Father's will calls us to be obedient as well. Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father who judges righteously. He personally bore our sins in His body so that we could die to sin and live to righteousness. His wounds heal us spiritually. We must be thankful that Jesus was faithful to the Father and to us.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to John 14:27-31. Jesus is here speaking to the apostles on the night before He is to die upon the cross. He's concerned about them, but He also wants to tell them why He's doing what He's doing.

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

If we ask the question, "What does it mean to be faithful?" we could hardly find a better example than to look at Jesus Christ, our Lord. Hebrews 2:5-6 says, "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." Christ spoke the truth, was kind and helpful, loved everyone, converted sinners but never sinned Himself, and always obeyed and pleased His Father in heaven. Jesus was loyal, committed, steadfast, and trusting of His Father. So committed and zealous was He that He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). Doing the Father's will was always on the heart of Jesus and it motivated His every act on earth. That's what it means to be faithful.

Philippians 2:5-8 tells us what kind of thinking we should have toward God. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of

God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus, out of love, humbled himself and obeyed His Father’s will by enduring the agonizing death of crucifixion.

Jesus was not interested in seeking His own will but in fully accomplishing the work that His Father had given Him to do. Many people characterized Him as a revolutionary or a libertine, who sought religious freedom. Jesus certainly did seek freedom: that is freedom from the traditions of men and freedom from sin for His people. But Jesus never sought freedom to do His own will, nor did He ever seek freedom from the will of God. He never sought to change God’s will. The psalmist in Psalm 40:6-8 prophesied of the Messiah who would come to do the Father’s will.

Hebrews 10:5-7 says, “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.’ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” “I have come to do Your will, O God,” was the very substance of His life. Jesus never conceived of freedom from God’s will. He saw the true freedom in the will of God. The Lord Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

This attitude permeated every aspect of His life. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19). It’s simply not in the character of Jesus to act on His own authority apart from the Father. He said, “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30). Jesus does not strike out on His own, even in the areas where God is silent. His task is to fulfill the revealed will of God. The Father told Him what to do and sent Him to earth to do it. And so, Jesus respects that and He never thinks to go beyond His authority; He never wanted to go beyond the Father’s instructions. It was enough for Him just to do as the Father instructed. You never hear Jesus acting on His own and justifying His behavior by saying, “Well, the Father never told Me not to.”

No, instead, Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:28-29). Rather than strike out on His own, Jesus did what He was taught by the Father. The Lord Jesus said, “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me” (John 12:49-50).

Jesus spoke what God wanted Him to say in the way that God wanted Him to say it. Hebrews 1:2 reminds us that God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” Such a message is so important to God and to all humanity that God entrusted it to no one other than His own Son, Jesus Christ. I’m thankful Jesus gave the message carefully, completely, diligently, lovingly and accurately. I’m glad that He faithfully gave it just as it was given to

Him. I wouldn't want an innovated message, or a corrupted message, or a substituted message, or a shortened message to judge my soul. I want the whole truth. Teaching things correctly was important to Jesus. He spoke what He heard from the Father; He spoke all that He heard; and He spoke no more than He heard. Jesus didn't presume freedom to vary from the message or to edit it.

On His way to the cross, the Lord Jesus said, "but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" (John 14:31). Jesus Christ expressed that His love kept Him doing just what the Father commanded, nothing more and nothing less. This diligence to please the Father is a noteworthy example for us today. Limiting ourselves only to that which is taught in the New Testament, by the words of Jesus, is not an act of self-righteousness but an effort to please the God that we love.

In John 14:31 Jesus professes His love for His Father. This is the only statement of that love in such a direct manner. Jesus wants the "world" to know of His love and how He does love the Father, desperately, completely, urgently. One can see it clearly in the way that Jesus obeys. His strict adherence to the commandment of the Father reflects a pure, perfect love for His Father. We see in Jesus what John meant, "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says 'I know Him' but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

As a lover of the Father, God, Jesus was not a legalist, nor was He a heartless dogmatist. He had no axe to grind against others by strictly adhering to the Father's commandment. Nor was Jesus playing a game of "holier-than-thou." He wasn't trying to justify Himself to the "Pharisees" or satisfy the multitudes. He faithfully and lovingly obeyed His Father. He took the narrow road that He asks others to take. The Lord Jesus so loved the Father that He was willing to sacrifice Himself in order to do the Father's will.

The Lord Jesus promised, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:23-24). If you want to have a strong relationship with the Lord, if you want the Father to love you, if you want God to live with you, then love God enough to keep His Word. If you refuse to keep His Words, you show that you really don't love the Father. How you live speaks to God about whether you love Him or not.

Faith, love, and obedience blend together and they're inseparable. Don't brag about believing if you aren't also obeying the Lord. Don't brag about loving the Lord if you aren't willing to obey His teaching. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36.) Saying you believe but being unwilling to obey shows that you don't really trust God enough to do what He commands.

When the New Testament speaks of saving faith, it implies an obedient faith. In Romans 1:5, Paul speaks of receiving grace and apostleship through Jesus Christ in order "to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake." The idea that a person is saved at the point that he believes, but hasn't obeyed the Lord assumes way too much and ignores all the Bible has to say about what is needed for salvation. Hebrews 5:8-9

says, "Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Just as Jesus learned obedience when He went to the cross, so we too must learn to obey in faith and from the heart.

Romans 6:16-18 says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." The children of God are not set free from sin until they obey from the heart the standard of teaching to which they were committed. God saves us when by faith, we lovingly obey.

This agrees with the statement by Paul to the Galatians. 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." The faithful here are those who've heard the word, believed it, and were baptized into Christ. In baptism, they put on Christ, or they "clothed themselves with Christ." Before they were baptized into Christ they were still outside of Christ.

James 1:22-25 says, "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 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." If you wish to be blessed by God, then do more than hear! Be a doer of the word! Humble your heart, listen to the Lord, and obey His teaching! That's what real faith is all about. That's the kind of life that Jesus lived.

To be faithful today, we must humble ourselves and be determined to follow the revealed will of God. I hear many people speak of being led by the Holy Spirit in a personal way, as if the Holy Spirit were communicating to them individually. The Lord Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all the truth. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you (speaking to the apostles) into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-14). Like the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit never speaks on His own authority. He only reveals what the Father and the Son reveal to Him. The apostles recorded what the Spirit revealed to them.

The Lord Jesus promised the Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth. For this reason, we can be confident the Spirit isn't adding new revelations today. People today claim to speak by the Spirit, but the Spirit gave all the truth to the apostles in the first century. There isn't anything new being revealed today.

If you wish to do the will of the Father, then look to what Jesus and the Holy Spirit spoke through the apostles and prophets in the New Testament. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from sin to righteousness, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. God will wash away your sins, save your soul, make you His child, and add you to His church. Oh, do it today!

## Faithful Christians

If I ask you do you believe in Jesus, you would likely say yes? If I ask you are you faithful to Jesus, what would you say? Today, we're considering what it means to be faithful. We search God's will because we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We believe He died for our sins and on the third day arose from the dead. We believe He offers forgiveness of sins, grace to sustain us from day to day, and hope for eternity. We believe that Jesus will come for us one day and raise us up from the dead to take us home to heaven. We believe we'll live with Him eternally in the place He has prepared for us. The Scriptures give us these precious promises. We don't want to miss out on any promise of God.

When Pompeii was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, there were many people buried in the ruins. Some were found in cellars, as if they had gone there for security. Some were found in the upper rooms of buildings. But where was the Roman sentinel found? He was standing at the city gate where his captain had placed him, with his hands still grasping his weapon. There, while the earth shook beneath him—there, while the floods of ashes and cinders covered him—he stood at his post. There, after a couple of thousand years, was this faithful man still to be found.

If Jesus were to come today, where would He find you? Will He find you with a Bible in your hand? Will He find you praying? Will He find you worshiping at church? Will He find you helping a friend, visiting a sick person, or telling a friend the gospel? I fear that many have lost sight of the responsibility to the Lord Jesus and to His church.

Our reading today comes from Matthew 25:19-23. This is a section in the parable of the talents, and it reveals the need to stay faithful.

Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, "Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

It's a great thing to be faithful to God, and to be able to enter into His joy.

Sadly, many folks today have stopped being faithful to the Lord. They used to go to church and take their faith seriously, but have stopped worshiping and living for the Lord. More people today say they have no relationship with God than at any time in my lifetime. Oh, I wish they knew my Lord Jesus and knew His love and His promises. I wish they took seriously the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many have never taken time to know the Lord, and others have drifted away. Hebrews 2:1-3 speaks of those who forget their need to be saved. It says, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" We have a great salvation, paid for at great cost, and with the greatest of promises. We can

live with God for all eternity. When you stop living your faith, you start losing out on such a great salvation. Is it worth it?

The Lord Jesus said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done" (Matthew 16:25-27). If you decide to live for yourself, you will lose your soul. On Judgment Day, it'll be too late to save your soul or change your destiny. The Lord will repay you for how you've lived. How will Jesus deal with you if you have abandoned your faith and you've quit on Him?

The Lord Jesus never gave up on you while He was suffering on the cross. He suffered for six long hours and never called a halt to His suffering. He could have called twelve legions of angels to stop the arrest, the trial, the scourging, or the crucifixion, but he went through all the pain and suffering to bring us to God and for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus didn't give up even though there were hypocrites all around Him. He stayed faithful. Jesus didn't give up even though one of His disciples betrayed Him and another denied Him. Jesus didn't give up even though His disciples scattered in fear. He didn't quit when they stripped Him and gambled over His clothes. Jesus didn't give up even though what He endured was filled with anguish. He didn't quit when they mercilessly mocked and despised Him. He didn't quit when the sun went dark and the earth shook beneath the cross. Though He was leaving His mother, Jesus didn't quit.

You ask, "Why?" Because He loved the Father, and He loved you. He wanted to save you and bring you to the Father. First Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." Jesus came to this earth to save His people from their sins.

He died a terrible death so you wouldn't be lost in sin and lose your soul. Second Corinthians 5:19-21 says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

How do we show our faithfulness to God? If we claim that we're believers, Christians, then what marks us as true believers? James once challenged Christians, "But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). Saying we have faith in Christ isn't a claim that can stand alone. Where's the proof? "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:20). Saying we have love for God appears empty when there is nothing to show for it.

When people in the earliest days of the church were forgiven and became Christians, the Lord added them to His church. Being in Christ and being in His church, according to the New Testament, are inseparable. "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Just as your head and your body are inseparable, so is Christ and His church!



First, if you would be faithful and active in Christ, you will also be faithful and active in His church. You'll assemble with the church, you'll encourage others in the church; and you'll worship as part of the church. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." I cannot imagine a person who loves the Lord not wanting to be with others who love the Lord. Being with others who are committed to Christ will help keep you spiritually strong. If you say you believe, then meet with others. Do you attend worship with the church regularly?

Second, if you would be faithful and active in Christ, then faithfully study the Word of God, the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." I cannot imagine a person who says he believes never picking up a Bible to know what the Lord he believes in says. Many people say they believe, but they don't even know what their God has said. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." The best way to grow your faith and your commitment to Christ is to diligently study God's Word every day. You can spend a lifetime studying and still hunger for more knowledge of God. Are you studying your Bible?

Third, if you want to be faithful, you'll spend time talking to God in prayer. Give praise and thank Him for all your blessings. Ask Him to continue blessing you and to supply your physical and spiritual needs. Pray for others. Confess your sins to Him and ask for forgiveness. Jesus continually prayed to His Father in heaven. Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." He taught us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). God wants to hear your prayers and wants to bless His children.

The Lord Jesus told a parable about being faithful to pray in Luke 18:1-8: "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, In a certain city there was a judge who didn't fear God and didn't respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?'" I hope that you're the kind of person that spends time with God in prayer every day. Do you pray regularly?

Fourth, if you call upon God as your Father, do you pay attention to His teaching about how to live morally. Second Timothy 2:19-22 says, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.' Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now

flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

When people call themselves Christian yet behave with sexual immorality, drunkenness, dishonesty, foul language, covetousness, and prejudice, they declare to the world they do not practice their faith. In the end, they actually bring shame upon the name of the Lord. Paul rebuked some Roman Christians for their inconsistent ways, “you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?” (Romans 2:21-22). If we are to be faithful to God, we must practice what we preach. We must live holy lives that honor God. Are you living a holy life?

Fifth, if we claim to believe, we should be faithful in serving others. James 2:14-17 says, “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” Love for God means loving others, and helping them when they’re in need. First John 3:16-18 says, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Don’t merely claim to believe in or love the Lord; make your faith come alive. Practice what you preach, what you believe. Live as God wishes you to live and honor Him with everything in your life. Love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. Live as if the Lord were coming for you today. Love Him! Serve Him!

The Lord is our final Judge, but the Lord wants us to examine ourselves. Second Corinthians 13:5 tells us, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” If you were to examine yourself, how faithful are you? Can those around you see Jesus Christ in you? Can they see His love shining in your life? Paul said He proclaimed Jesus, “admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

The Christians at Smyrna were undergoing persecution. The Lord Jesus told them, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). In this life there is no retirement plan for the Christian. God expects all of us to live faithfully as long as we live. We must never quit on the Lord.

To start your journey as a Christian, place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn from every sin and determine you’re going to serve the Lord. That’s repentance, and repentance is necessary to serve the Lord. Confess your faith and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water; and that’s what the word means. One is baptized “for the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 2:38) and to “wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16). When you’re baptized the Lord will make you His child (Galatians 3:26-27) and add you to His church (Acts 2:41). When you’re baptized you’re born again and you have newness of life. Oh, come to the Lord today!

## Unity in Christ

Churches throughout the world are very divided in their beliefs, and there is a difference between churches. Today, we're going to look at the Lord's desire for unity among His people. We follow the Lord's Way because Jesus is Lord of all. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. There's no one above Him, and there is no power that can overthrow Him or take away His authority. Our confession is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Lord. If Jesus is Lord, then we ought to obey Him. If the Lord will judge our eternal destiny, then we ought to pay great attention to everything He teaches and requires of us.

We live in a divided religious world. There are more than 230 organized religious groups in America and more than 35,000 nondenominational groups. As I travel through the country, I am amazed at the names of many of these groups and how they adopt these names to distinguish themselves. Each group adopts its own beliefs and practices according to its own desires. Many think we're never to make any judgments at all about what is right and wrong.

I heard recently about a church that told its people that however they wanted to come to Jesus was okay, and had people who said they were saved in a variety of ways. When I heard this, I wondered why Jesus did not have a say in the matter. Our culture thinks everyone has the right to believe anything He wants and still be right with the Lord. Isn't Jesus the Lord and isn't He the king? Doesn't He make the rules? If people make the rules as to who is a member of the Lord's church, then they really dismiss Jesus as Lord and become their own ruler. I recalled the words of Jesus, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Our reading today comes from The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians 4:1-6. This is Paul wanting the church at Ephesus to be united, to love each other, and to remain one.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

The Lord Jesus wants His people to be one. Paul was teaching them that very thing.

The Lord Jesus prayed that His people might be one. He wanted all who followed Him to be united just like He was united with His Father. He prayed, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23). One reason so many people reject Christianity is the great division found in our religious world. God never intended for it to happen; Jesus never prayed for it; and the Scriptures do not call for division within the body of Christ.

Before Jesus prayed for unity, He prayed for His people to believe the truth. He prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). They were first to be set apart and made holy in the truth. The idea that there can be many versions of the truth or that we could as individuals determine our own truth was never in the mind of God. The unity that

Jesus prayed for resembled the unity that He had with the Father in heaven. They were of like mind and purpose. To have unity, we should be of like mind and purpose with the Father as well.

When the church at Corinth showed division, Paul said, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Paul was appalled that this church would leave their commitment to Christ in order to follow men. He insisted that they be of the same mind and judgment. They were to conform to the Lord's teaching and leave their sectarian opinions and loyalties to men; to get rid of them.

The way of God in the New Testament calls us to unity, not division! It's a narrow path, not a diverse one. The Bible says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Let's search for the one true path that God laid out for us rather than create a multitude of paths, in our own image.

There is one body. Paul explained what this body is. "And He (that is, God) put all things in subjection under His (that is, Christ's) feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church is Christ's body. Ephesians 5:23 calls Christ "the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." Just like one head with many bodies is a grotesque thought and foreign to the Scriptures, so that Jesus could be the head of the church but there be many churches is grotesque and foreign to the Scriptures. The suggestion that all the different religious groups are still the one body can hardly be true. They differ in name, creed, belief, and practice. They make God a source of contradictions and confusion.

There is one Spirit, that is, one Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles. He said that He would "teach you (the apostles) all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth, as we noted (John 16:13). When people resist the Word of God, they resist the one Spirit who gave it.

There is one hope. "You were called in one hope of your calling." The Lord calls us today through the gospel. "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God gives us His Word in the hope that we will respond to it. The church in Thessalonica had responded. Paul said, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). When people accept the gospel message, they'll turn from worldly ways to the one hope that is in Christ.

There is one Lord. Because of His humble obedience on the cross, "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus

every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). Since Jesus is Lord and we are His servants, we do not belong to ourselves. We were bought with a price, and we are not our own but belong to Him. He has a right to make decisions that affect our lives, and we must obey Him. We must deny ourselves, take up our own crosses, and follow Him.

Colossians 1:15-18 describes our Lord Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn (that is, the ruler) of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 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." Does Jesus have first place in your life?

There is one faith. That faith refers to the gospel and to the teaching found in the New Testament. Acts 6:7 says many of the Jewish priests "were becoming obedient to the faith."

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 says, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." We are not only to hold fast to that faith in Jesus, but also to insist on it. Jude 3 says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." There is but one faith that has been handed down for all time, and we must hold fast to it.

Some Jewish Christians were trying to bind the Law of Moses on Gentile Christians, and the apostle Paul stood against them. He said, "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!" (Galatians 1:6-9). This is strong language. No one has a right to change the gospel – to add to it, to take away from it, to edit it, or to distort it.

There is one, and only one, baptism. The religious world will tell you that there are different forms and reasons for baptism in Christ, but Ephesians 4:5 says there is but one baptism. The word baptism is a specific term (baptidzo) and refers to an immersion or a dipping in water. There are different words for sprinkling (rhantidzo) and pouring (cheo). The practice of sprinkling or pouring for baptism came from men, not God; and it came much later than the practice found in the New Testament. They could not be the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5.

The Scriptures are clear that believers who repented were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures never suggest infants or little children were baptized into Christ. Baptizing little ones who are innocent and are too young to believe, and have nothing for which to repent cannot be the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5.

People say that one is saved before and without baptism, but the Scriptures teach one is baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to "be baptized

and wash away” his sins (Acts 22:16). Peter said, “baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21) Titus 3:5 says, “He (that is, God) saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This phrase, “the washing of regeneration,” is a reference to baptism, and everyone understood that clearly for more than 1500 years until a popular teacher began suggesting that one is saved without it. Unfortunately, people believed the teacher rather than the Scriptures. A baptism that comes after salvation is never contemplated in Scripture; it cannot be the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5.

There is one God and Father. Jesus entered a world in which there were many pagan gods, but He affirmed there is but one God who made heaven and earth. It's regrettable some men have assumed spiritual titles that exalt themselves. The Lord Jesus said, “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:9). No one on earth can take the Father's place in heaven, and all Christians are brothers. The Father is “over all and through all and in all.” Since God is over us, we humble ourselves before Him. He made everything, and one can see His wisdom and grace through all and in all.

The notion that there are many gods or we can become our own little god is foreign to the Scriptures. The great struggle of humanity arises in whether we take God seriously. God made us in His image, but we cannot become Him or replace Him. He is God, and we're not. He is infinite, and we are finite. He is perfect, and we are flawed. He is holy and good, and we are weak in the flesh. We need God to deliver us from ourselves. Do you have God in your life?

If there is only one of something, there cannot be many. If there is only one of something, there cannot be even two. Our culture wants freedom for people to believe any religious view; but the Scriptures don't teach unity in diversity. They teach unity by commitment to the one true God and His Son Jesus, and to the teaching that the Father and Son gave once for all time.

Someone says, “Phil, that sounds narrow-minded!” Yes, it does! The Lord, to whom we belong, is clear about many things and demands that we do the will of the Father in heaven. We must follow the narrow path because the broad way leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). The Lord Jesus didn't give us forty different gospels or build forty different churches with forty different baptisms. He decided on one gospel and has one body. My purpose is not to be narrow-minded in a worldly sense but to be “Christ-minded” in a spiritual sense. I want to bring “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

This is why we must reject man-made religious beliefs and practices. The only path to the unity for which Jesus prayed comes from following the Lord Jesus as He revealed the will of the Father, and that in Scripture. When we all focus on the will of the Father, we see things alike. When we focus on our own will or our own desires, we'll go a thousand different ways. Following Jesus isn't doing our own thing spiritually; following Jesus is obedience to His will.

To become a Christian, trust in the Lord and in His Word; repent of your sins; confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Don't settle for some other path that is never mentioned in Scripture. Obey the Lord today and get right with God!

## The Gospel and Salvation

How does God assure us of our salvation? Some say it's by a special feeling and others say it's by the Word of God. Today, we're looking at how God gives us assurance. Speaking of the Word of God, David said, "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:9-10). The Bible is a treasure; it opens the door to God's heart and His promises. We can come to know God and His grace that is given through the teaching of Scripture. That's why, when we want to know about God and how He works in this world today, we go to the Bible. The Bible is the only sure source of Divine truth.

Many churches teach that babies are born with original sin. They say that this inherited, original sin so corrupts a child that he's utterly lost and incapable of choosing or even desiring God. They say that without the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, a person is not able to respond to God's call to believe the gospel and to obey it. They say the Holy Spirit must miraculously change them before they can believe at all.

But as you read through the Bible, and especially those early stories of conversion, you find something quite different. Instead of stories about some miraculous experience opening the corrupted hearts of people so they can believe, you read about the apostles and the disciples preaching the gospel. They preached how Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and the good news of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. When people heard the gospel, that preaching, they believed and responded to what they heard. People can and did desire and choose God! Amazing! The gospel and salvation are related.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus Himself. These are the last words in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus is giving marching orders to His apostles.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His marching orders to His apostles and disciples. He gave them their most important task, the great commission. Jesus commissioned them to preach the gospel to every person in every place for all time.

The book of Acts constantly emphasizes preaching the gospel. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. When Peter revealed how God had made Jesus Christ both Lord and Christ, the Jesus whom they crucified, the people were filled with guilt. They wanted to know what to do. Peter didn't tell them the Holy Spirit had already worked a miracle in their lives. He told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

Verse 41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." These Jews, who had crucified Jesus and needed forgiveness, accepted what Peter said and obeyed it. Three thousand repented and were baptized. They came to the Lord by obeying what they heard. They didn't have an experience or pray through. They simply accepted what they heard and they obeyed it.

Verse 42 says, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." They devoted themselves to learn more and more of the will of Jesus Christ. They told the story of the death, burial and resurrection of

Christ repeatedly to everyone. Acts 4:4 says, “But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” There was no spiritual experience miraculously changing their nature. They simply heard the message and believed.

Acts 6:7 says, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” The more they preached the gospel the more people believed and became obedient to the faith.

When persecution arose and the Jews stoned Stephen, the church didn't stop believing or preaching. Acts 8:4-5 says, “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.” Preaching led the way. Acts 8:12 says, “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news (that is, the gospel) about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.” Again, there's no miraculously changing of hearts by the Holy Spirit, some miraculous event. The power to change hearts was not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit but a change that came from preaching the gospel.

Later in Acts 8, Philip taught an Ethiopian eunuch. An angel and the Holy Spirit spoke directly to the preacher Philip, but the communication between Philip and the Eunuch was a normal conversation. There's simply no indication of some spiritual experience changing the Eunuch from a sinner to a believer. What we have is a simple, gospel sermon.

The eunuch asked Philip, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet (the prophet Isaiah) say this? Of himself or of someone else?” (Acts 8:34). This is not the question of a man who is miraculously saved; this is the sincere question of someone seeking the truth. Verses 35-36 say, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Preaching made the difference.

When Saul of Tarsus was on the road to Damascus, he was miraculously blinded and had a conversation with the Lord Jesus. Acts 9 says nothing of Jesus miraculously changing Saul's heart on the road; but in verse six Jesus said, “but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” Though Saul fasted and prayed fervently, he was not saved until three days later when Ananias came to him and told him, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). For Saul of Tarsus salvation was not a “better-felt-than-told” experience but came when he responded to the gospel by faith and obedience in baptism. That's when his sins were washed away.

Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he continually prayed, and gave many alms to the Jewish people; but he was not saved. An angel appeared to him, but there's no suggestion that he was saved when the angel appeared. The angel told him to send for Peter in Joppa, and Cornelius did so. Peter came to preach Jesus to Cornelius and his loved ones. Acts 11:14 says Peter spoke “words to you (that is, to Cornelius) by which you will be saved, you and all your household.” It wasn't the gift of tongue speaking that saved Cornelius and his household; it was gospel preaching.

God uses the gospel to touch people's hearts, to convict them of sin, and to teach them about salvation. Paul wanted to preach in Rome so people could be saved. So Paul said in Romans 1:13-16, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in



Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” It isn’t some experience that saves but a response to the gospel. According to Romans 1:5, Paul said that he “received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith.” The gospel is preached to bring about that obedience!

Paul explained in Romans 6:16-18, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

First, we need to know that people can choose to obey sin or obey the Lord. Even slaves to sin are not so totally corrupt that they cannot desire or decide to follow God. Second, these slaves of sin could understand and obey the teaching from the heart. Their hearts weren’t so corrupted or hardened that they were prevented from obeying righteousness. Third, obedience to the teaching transformed these slaves of sin to servants of righteousness. This passage says nothing about a direct operation of the Spirit that miraculously changes people before obedience. Romans clearly says that believing and obeying the gospel is what transforms people from sinners into servants of the Lord.

First Corinthians 1:21 says, “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.” Salvation is not in the messenger but in the message of God’s love and the cross. Faith comes from hearing the gospel preached. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” People come to faith when they hear the Word of Christ. The Word of God! Faith follows hearing the gospel, not some “better-felt-than-told” experience.

The apostle John wrote, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). The gospel story of Jesus brings faith, which can lead to eternal life. The Scriptures are divinely inspired, God-breathed, and have the power to bring faith, and to save.

Paul wrote, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). When people hear, receive, and take their stand on the gospel of Christ, they can be saved by it. They must believe and hold fast to it if they’re to be saved.

James wrote, “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). People must repent and humbly accept God’s Word. The implanted word, the Word of God, “is able to save your souls.” James didn’t tell people to “pray through” or ask God for an experience. He pointed to repentance and humbling the heart so that they might receive the Word.

Peter knew that being born again was not through some miraculous experience but the

result of hearing and obeying the Word of God. Peter said Christians purified their souls by their obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22). He explains in verses 23-25, “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.”

The Spirit directly inspired those who spoke the gospel and those who wrote down the words in the New Testament. Jesus promised to send out scribes in Matthew 23:34 so people might record His words for all generations. That’s why we go to the New Testament, go to the Bible, and why the Bible’s message matters. We can know the words of Jesus, because scribes wrote them down; and His words appear in the New Testament. Peter said, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, (that is, they didn’t make it up) for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Those who wrote Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit. They didn’t write on their own initiative or make up stories. God produced the Scriptures by working in and through men. God uses this Divine message to pierce our hearts, just as He did on Pentecost.

God draws us through the gospel. The Lord Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (John 6:44-45). The Lord draws us when we hear the message of His love and grace. Preaching the cross draws people to God, not some personal experience. The Lord Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). Christ died on the cross to demonstrate His love and grace. Let’s hear about that grace and respond.

First Timothy 2:4 says that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The Father gave His Son on the cross to save us and gave us the gospel message so that we might know the truth. Even in sin, people can repent and choose to follow the Lord. There is hope! The gospel is “good” news! Jesus wants the gospel preached to everyone!

Some quote Acts 16:14 and say the Lord directly and miraculously changes our hearts. Acts 16:13-14 says Paul “sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” The Lord opened Lydia’s heart by the power of the gospel message. In Colossians 4:2-4 Paul urged the church to pray “that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” Why pray for an opportunity for the Word? Because God uses the gospel message to open hearts!

To be saved, we must hear the Word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing. If we receive the gospel, the Word will open our hearts. With love and faith, we must respond to the gospel by placing our trust in Christ as God’s Son, repent of our sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, and be baptized. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water. When you’re baptized, the Lord washes away your sins (Acts 22:16). He makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27), and He adds you to the church. Won’t you come to God today?

## How Jesus Viewed Scripture

People have many ideas about the Bible, but we're considering today how Jesus views Scripture. If we know how the Lord sees Scripture, it will help us to know how we should see it as well. We love the Bible because it tells us about the Lord and reveals God's will for our lives. God loves us and teaches us the way that is best for us. God's way lifts us up, protects us from the destructive nature of sin, and points us to what is right. God's way is always true, always helpful, and always the best way. Through the centuries, people have never been able to improve on God's guidance or God's morals.

Over the last few centuries, some people have assumed the Bible is merely an ancient book of myths and legends. Those who don't believe in God don't believe that His Word is any better than any other book. They see it only as the product of human ingenuity, a product of the culture. They may grudgingly admit it's a unique book that proclaims a high moral standard, but they're unwilling to say that it's God-given.

Whether the Bible is human or Divine in origin matters a great deal. If the book is merely human, it offers some valuable opinions and perspectives; but if it's Divine, it has the authority of God behind it. If God has spoken through the Bible, we're obligated to hear and obey its teaching, to honor its morality, and to pay attention to its warnings. If God speaks through the Bible, we can also trust in its promises. You can't dismiss Scripture if God is its author. So our question today is how did Jesus view Scripture.

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter 1:22-25. Peter in this passage reveals to us just how important the Word of God is to our lives and how we're born again through the Word.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

When the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness in Matthew 4, the devil tempted Him with things that appealed to His flesh, His eyes, and His pride. The devil first tempted Jesus with the words, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." How did the devil know that Jesus was the Son of God? The Father from heaven acknowledged Jesus as His beloved Son at His baptism according to Matthew 3:17; but the devil knew far more. Satan knew the Messianic prophecies and how John recognized Him as the "Lamb of God" in fulfillment of those prophecies.

When the devil suggested Jesus, if He was the Son of God, command this stone to become bread, Jesus answered him from God's Word. The Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" In each temptation Jesus answered with Scripture; He said three times to Satan, "It is written." Jesus made it clear that He would live by God's Word. What God wrote was law when He wrote it, and Jesus knew that time does not remove its authority. It stood as God's will, and He would not violate it to please the devil.

The Lord Jesus showed His respect for Scripture by using phrases such as "Have you not read...?" (Matthew 21:16), or "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures..." (Matthew 22:29). For Jesus, Scripture is indestructible. It cannot be annulled or broken (John 10:35). It stood

written and was still in force.

The Lord Jesus also spoke of our need to obey God's Word. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Every Word that God speaks is vital to life and to our relationship with God. Moses called Israel to keep the commandments of God and to choose life. He said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

The Lord Jesus knew keeping God's Word was life, and disobeying it was death. But there's more to this. Keeping God's Word is how we prove our love for God. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). He gets even more pointed in verses 23-24, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."

Love to God means obeying what He teaches in His Word, and God promises to make His home with the person who loves Him. But the one who doesn't love Him will not obey His Words. He'll do as he pleases.

Jesus felt close to all who obey God. Mark reveals that the Lord's mother and brothers came seeking Him one day. The Lord asked, "'Who are my mother and my brothers?'" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers!'" (Mark 3:33-34). If you wish to draw close to God, you must pay attention to His Word. The Word is how He communicates to us today. If we ignore His Word, we are ignoring Him.

The apostle Peter pointed to the prophecy of Moses about Jesus Christ found in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18-19. Peter said, "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people'" (Acts 3:22-23). Our relationship with God depends on whether we listen to and obey Him.

The Lord Jesus is a prophet, but He's far more than a prophet. He is the Son of God and has all authority. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). That authority allows Him to give us eternal life (John 17:2) and to judge us (2 Corinthians 5:10). We'll be judged by His Words, and that means we've got to pay attention to what He says. Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive (that is, accept or embrace) My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48).

Jesus expects us to pay attention to every Word that God spoke. He came to fulfill every prophecy in Scripture. After his resurrection, Jesus explained to the disciples, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45).

The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into three parts: Law, Prophets, and Psalms. The Hebrew Bible consisted of 24 books that are identical to our 39 books found in the English Old Testament. When Jesus is speaking of the Scriptures, He gives credibility to all that was written in the Old Testament and how those prophecies of God "must be fulfilled."

The New Testament is also Scripture. When the inspired apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, he quoted from the Old Testament and from the New Testament in the same verse. Paul wrote, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages'" (1 Timothy 5:18). The passage about muzzling the ox comes from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the passage about the laborer deserving his wages comes from Luke 10:7. Paul regarded Luke just as inspired as Moses.

The apostle Peter also acknowledges what Paul wrote as Scripture. The apostle Peter wrote, "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Jesus regarded all of God's Word as true. When He spoke of the events of the Old Testament, He treated them as historical realities. There's never any hint that Jesus thought of the Bible as full of fairy tales and myths. In Matthew 19, He spoke of Adam and Eve in the beginning. In Matthew 24, He spoke of Noah and the flood. In Matthew 11, Jesus speaks of Sodom's destruction.

In Matthew 12, Jesus spoke of Jonah in the belly of the great fish. In Matthew 23:34 to 36 the Lord speaks of the first and last martyrs in the Bible when he said, "from Abel to Zechariah." This is a reference from Genesis to Chronicles, the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible. It's clear that Jesus regarded the Bible as a record of utterly true events.

If we ask, "Did Jesus believe the Scriptures to be inerrant?" The answer without question is yes. He believed them to be utterly true and trustworthy. Never once did He suggest the Scriptures were inaccurate, or had errors or mistakes. In fact, Jesus regarded every word of every letter as God-given, and relevant to our lives, and indestructible.

The Lord Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Nor did Jesus mistake the holy and God-inspired Scripture with the beliefs and practices of human religion. Many objections that I hear to Christianity have little to do with what God actually teaches and much to do with the unwarranted teachings and foolish practices of men.

Jesus faced this very problem with the Pharisees who had not one but two sources for their beliefs and practices. They believed in the written Law, but they also believed in their oral law. They believed that Moses handed down from generation to generation an oral tradition, which they bound on themselves and on everyone else.

Jesus distinguished what God said from the human traditions that the Jews had handed down. One must never put the teachings of men above the Word of God. The Jews actually used their traditions to accuse Jesus of sinning in Matthew 15:2. They asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." Jesus and his disciples were not slobs. They washed their hands before eating, but they didn't follow the traditional rituals of the Jews when they did so.

Jesus answered and said to these Pharisees "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,'

and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God" (Matthew 15:3-6). They were taking money they were supposed to use in supporting their aged parents and contributing it to God instead. They were violating the Scripture to look good in front of their peers.

Jesus said to them, "You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matthew 15:7-9). When people confuse human doctrines with the teaching of God, they move away from God and worship in vain. For Jesus, Scripture was the means by which people understood God's will so they could keep their hearts close to Him. When they moved away from Scripture, they moved away from God.

How should we deal with human religion? The Lord Jesus said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:13-14). When people teach something on their own initiative and based on their own wisdom, they are planting something that God will uproot. Ignoring Scripture to follow blindly human creeds and practices will cause people to be lost.

Don't be fooled. Just because something calls itself "religious" or even calls itself "Christian" doesn't mean that it is biblical. There's a great difference between the true faith of Jesus Christ that comes out of Scripture and the false religions of the world. There is a big difference between the true faith and the true church that can be found in Scripture. It's very different from all of these churches that really are following after the culture and the world. Culture does not trump the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus made this distinction that we go back to the book, back to the Word, back to God and back to Scripture; let's honor the will of the Lord.

The Word of God is indestructible and doesn't change. People change; human ideas change; cultures change. But God's Word teaches today the same things it taught when it was written nearly two thousand years ago. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." That's what Jesus meant when He said, "It is written."

People can ignore it, criticize it, hate it, deny it, or resist it; but the Word of God is "firmly fixed in the heavens." Nothing can remove it! When our lives are over, the Bible will still say what it has always said. The Bible will still be true and still reveal God's authority over our lives. What it called sin in the first century will still be called sin, and what pleased God in the first century still pleases Him in the twenty-first century. God's will is firmly fixed in the heavens, whether we agree with the Lord or not.

If Jesus put his confidence in the Scriptures, we can, too. If the Son of God relied on its accuracy, we can, too. Man lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Jesus has the Words of eternal life, and they're found in the Bible. Let's read the Bible, study it, and follow it!

I hope and pray that you're thinking of becoming a Christian. To become one, you must believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him. This book contains His Word. Turn from your sins, because sin violates God's teaching. Make it your business to live for Jesus. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. God washes away our sins by the blood of Jesus when we're baptized according to Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3-7. Oh, I hope you'll be obedient today!