

Program Transcripts

May 2021



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

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When people speak of Christianity today, it's often quite different from what the New Testament teaches about Christianity. What is authentic Christianity, the faith that Jesus taught really like?

MAY 9 – A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Many people are burdened by shame and guilt. Perhaps you too have felt burdened. How do we get a good conscience and what would you do to gain a good conscience? We're exploring the value of a good conscience.

MAY 16 – HEAVEN REJOICES

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MAY 23 – WORSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

The pandemic has kept many people at home from worship for more than a year. While some congregations are now assembling, many individuals are assembling with them. Here are reasons to get back to worship at church.

MAY 30 – WHY WE EVANGELIZE

Some folks ask why Christians tell others about Jesus Christ and encourage them to be members of the church. While no one wants to impose their faith on another, we do want to persuade others to follow Jesus.

Authentic Christianity

When people speak of Christianity, it's often quite different from what the New Testament teaches about Christianity. What is authentic Christianity; what is it really like? If you ask the question, "what is Christianity?" people will give you all kinds of opinions. They'll tell you what they think Christianity is or what they wish it were. People see Christianity historically and socially as it appears in America; but if that's all they see, they may never know what Christianity really is. Today we're exploring the question, "What is authentic Christianity?" Is the Christianity we see today what God intended when He sent Jesus into this world? In the early days Christians were known among themselves as "brethren," "the faithful," "the elect," "saints" (all of them were called saints), and they were also thought of as "believers." But people outside the church called them "Christians." This term came by the will of God, and it was universally accepted.

You might think the word "Christian" would occur frequently in the New Testament, but it occurs only three times. The word "Christian" refers to an individual who "belongs to Christ." Originally, words that ended in the letters "i-a-n" applied to the slaves belonging to the great households; it had passed into regular use to refer to followers of an individual or a party. Some Bible dictionaries define the word "Christian" as "The name given by the Greeks or Romans, probably in reproach, to the followers of Jesus. It was first used at Antioch." However, the name "Christian" is far more than that, as we will see.

Our reading today in the New Testament comes from the book of Acts 26:24-29. "While *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you're out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.' But Paul said, 'I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa *replied* to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian.' And Paul *said*, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'"

The first time "Christian" is used in the New Testament is Acts 11:25-26. "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." The word for "called" here is *chrematisai*, not the common word for "called" from the word *kalleo*. *Chrematisai* refers to a divinely revealed name or instruction. The name "Christian" didn't actually come from men; it came from God in fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 62:2: "The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will designate."

To call myself a Christian means that I am a servant of Christ. I wear His name; I follow His teaching; I call upon him as my Lord, and share in His spiritual and moral way of life. A disciple is a person who imitates his master, becomes like him in manner, in speech, in mind, and in behavior. The disciples were called Christians. Both words, "disciples" and "Christians," show the close relationship between the Lord Jesus and those who follow him. I am happy and honored to wear the name of Jesus Christ. I love Him and I want to wear His name. And I don't mind the world knowing that I am His servant.

The second time the word “Christian” is used is also found in the book of Acts. In chapter 26, Paul is defending himself and his faith before the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king, Herod Agrippa. “‘King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’ And Paul said, ‘Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains’” (Acts 26:27-29). Paul wished everyone were a Christian, and so do I. I hope you’re a Christian.

People choose to be Christians; nobody is born one. We might be born into a family of Christians, but that doesn’t make us a Christian. We have to decide for ourselves. We must be born again to become a Christian. We do that when we by faith decide to follow Christ and to be baptized. The Bible says, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, that you’re slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 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 the slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18). You can become a Christian by your heartfelt obedience to the gospel. Each of you, each of all of us, must choose to believe and to obey.

The Bible teaches in Ephesians about the transformation that takes place when a person becomes a Christian. “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They’re darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that’s in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves over to sensuality, to greed and every practice of every impurity. But that’s not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you’ve heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

You must make a true change when you decide to become a Christian. You must leave an old sinful way of life, a way that’s darkened and futile; and you must put on the new way of life that is patterned after Jesus Christ. A Christian who loves the Lord no longer wants to live the way the world lives. He sees an abundant life that is higher and nobler than his old way. Christianity is the way that people become new. They’re no longer darkened in their understanding, living callous and impure lives. In Christ, they have learned a better way, full of love and full of good deeds. People learn Christ, and as they grow in their knowledge, their lives become better and better.

The third Scripture which mentions the name “Christian” is 1 Peter 4:15-16. These verses say: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” In this passage, the Bible says that one should not be ashamed of being a Christian but to glorify God in THAT name, that God-given name that associates us with Jesus Christ, our Lord. Christians were undergoing serious persecution at the time that Peter wrote this to them. I could see how some might feel hesitant to admit that they were Christians, if it meant persecution. Others might hesitate if they acted sinfully and brought reproach upon their faith. But wearing the name of Christ honorably glorifies God. This is truly the name that God designates for his people.

The apostle Paul, like Peter, was willing to endure whatever shame and punishment was necessary in order to preach the gospel and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul felt obligated to serve the Lord in a pagan society. He said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:14-16). No one has to be ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus because of all the good that Christ does in their lives.

A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed when he wakes up without a hangover. A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed that he tells the truth, that he keeps his word, that he practices what is right, and that he loves his neighbor. The way of Christians is God's way, God's plan to bless all of mankind. That's why Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are God's people making a difference for good and right in an evil world. In their lives they prove what the will of God is, that which is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

What does it mean then to be a Christian? It means: I don't belong to me; I totally belong to my Lord Jesus Christ. I have given Him first place in my life. I believe what He teaches. I practice a life that imitates Him. He loves, so I love. He gives of himself, so I give of myself. He avoids evil, so I avoid evil. He kept his heart right, so I keep my heart right. To belong totally to Christ is a radical notion. The reason many people wonder what a Christian is arises from the fact that many so-called Christians play with the notion of following Christ but never fully embrace the idea that we fully belong to him and not to ourselves.

Many think being a Christian is a great thing until it interferes with what they want to do. They're willing to let God be a part of their lives to some extent, but they're unwilling to follow Jesus when they don't agree with Him or they don't like what He asks of them. They like Jesus until he interferes with their freedom to live as they please. Such people may call themselves Christians, but they're only fair-weather Christians.

They've forgotten the price that Jesus paid to redeem them. The Bible says, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold (you know, God could have made all the silver and gold He wanted; you could have been redeemed by that, but that wouldn't have cost anything; no, it wasn't by silver or gold that you were redeemed), but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Lord Jesus paid His precious blood to save and redeem you from sin and from hell. What He has done for you and will give to you far outweighs any earthly pleasure. We all ought to count it an honor to belong to Jesus.

The Bible says, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and then transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Jesus took us from sin and darkness and brought us into the kingdom of hope and peace and promise. He rescued us from an evil world and brought us to the love of God. How could we imagine living ungodly lives when we consider all that he has done for us? First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

In the book of Philippians, Paul described himself in chapter one and verse one as a bond-servant of Christ Jesus. To be a bond-servant means that I am a slave, a slave in chains to my Lord. The Lord owns me, and He has a right to make important decisions that affect my life,

decisions that I cannot change, that I cannot overrule. Christianity is not a democracy where I can vote things in and vote things out; it's a kingdom. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is in charge; He makes the rules; and we must submit our hearts to Him.

So much of what people think of as "Christianity" is changed from what Jesus meant for it to be. People have filled it full of human creeds and human traditions so that it hardly resembles His divinely revealed will in the New Testament. For many people, Christianity is like a smorgasbord laid out for them, and they can pick and choose whatever they like. In their minds you pick the kind of Christianity, the kind of Jesus that you want. You pick the kind of church that you like. You pick what you want to believe and you can leave the rest alone if you like. Many fail to hear God fully but hear only what they want to hear. That kind of religion is not the Christianity of the Bible; it's the kind of Christianity that people manufacture for themselves. It's not divine; it's human!

New Testament Christianity is built upon the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! It's built on divine truth found in the Scriptures because God never lies. Jesus loves us so much that He willingly died for us. His grace and forgiveness are available to all. He's the Lord of all mankind, you and me and everybody. His words are the final authority for our faith, our practices, and our morals. You may think that you have a say so, but God has the last say, and what He says is powerful and authoritative. His promises are open to all who will believe and obey, and He's coming again to judge the world in righteousness.

Biblical Christianity is the most exciting, fulfilling, powerful, and loving life imaginable. To have Jesus as Lord and Savior, and God as our Father is the best life with the best mission and the best result. God wants us to spread the good word to everyone. In Mark 16:15-16 Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Jesus is in the saving business, and His church is the way that He spreads the gospel to all.

People often define Christianity unfairly. Many don't understand the Christianity of the New Testament. Talk to some about Christianity and they bring up the crusades or witch trials. But neither the crusades or the Salem witch trials or the inquisition reflect New Testament Christianity. Titles, robes, cathedrals, and icons don't show simple, New Testament Christianity. Monasteries, and incense, sitting on flagpoles, vows of silence, and forced celibacy don't reflect the Christianity of the Bible. Worship concerts, enterprises, fake healings have nothing to do with the Christianity of the New Testament. If you want to know what real Christianity is, look in the Scriptures. The New Testament gives God's truth.

New Testament Christianity is God's way to bless this world with love, with purity, with grace, with hope, and with heaven. Titus 2:11-14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Are you one of the redeemed? Have you become a Christian? To become one, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church. He'll rescue you out of the domain of darkness and transfer you into His kingdom. Don't let even one day go by outside of Christ or true Christianity.

A Good Conscience

Many people are burdened by shame and guilt. What would you do to gain a good conscience? When we follow God's will, He blesses us spiritually with peace, joy, and a good conscience. Salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, hope, and peace all come through God's blessing of grace. When we obey the truth of God, God purifies our souls (1 Peter 1:22). He puts us on the right track.

Paul charged Timothy, "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:18-19). There are few blessings in life more heart-warming than realizing that you have done the right thing. Guilt brings shame, but righteousness gives one inner peace with God and himself. A good conscience allows a person to sleep peacefully, while a guilty conscience burdens a person with regret and fear.

I've often heard people say, "If I could just go back and do things over, I wouldn't have done that awful thing." They regret words they spoke, harm they caused, and choices they made. People can't change the past, but they can find a solution to the evils in their past through the grace and forgiveness of God. They can be born again and crucify their old man of sin. They can have a new life filled with grace and peace rather than sin and regret. What would you give to have a good conscience? Are your past mistakes burdening you? When people have unresolved sin in their lives, they begin to feel small in their own eyes. They're like the prodigal son who didn't feel worthy to be his father's son. Thankfully, God gives us the answer!

Our scripture reading today comes from Hebrews 10: 22-25, discussing how we are to approach God as we come and worship Him.

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

A Christian lady described an incident when she was only five years old. She was at her grandfather's house all dressed up in a white dress with new gloves, proud as she could be. Her granddaddy told her she could go into the kitchen and get herself a special cookie. Next to the cookies was a stack of quarters. Sure that no one was looking, she took a quarter.

When she returned with her cookie, her granddaddy asked her to show him her gloves. She held out only her left hand and he said, "Show me the other hand." When she reluctantly did so and revealed the quarter, she immediately saw disappointment in her grandpa's eyes. He paused a moment and then he "hugged me up" and said, "Darlin', you can have anything in the world that I have, but it breaks my heart that you would ever steal it." Some 50 years later this story of how her granddaddy gave her the gift of conscience still brought tears to her eyes. Few things have as large an impact on shaping the values of a child as the sting of lovingly administered shame. It helps to define right from wrong and gives a powerful emotional dimension to issues of ethics and character.

Titus 1:15-16 describes the difference between a good conscience and a defiled one. "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed."

Many people speak as if all guilt is a terrible thing. It's not! I would worry far more about someone who feels no guilt or shame. I realize that some have abused others with shame, but I'm not arguing for abuse. I'm arguing for a heart that feels shame when it is truly guilty. Sadly, some feel no shame for their sins. Jeremiah described people in his day, "'Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 6:15). When people are callous to their sins and feel no shame, they also have little use for moral behavior.

God gave us a conscience, that voice in our hearts, and it's for our blessing. The conscience is a moral governor that warns and judges wrong and praises righteousness. Guilt stings us for what is evil and warns us to repent. Every thinking person should be thankful for the conscience as one of God's gifts. We are moral beings, because God is moral and made us to be.

Many ignore their guilt and make their hearts callous. First Timothy 4:2 speaks of "liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." Others don't see the seriousness of sin. Sin is described for them as a "mistake," or "poor judgment," or "the result of wrong influences," or even "a valid choice of lifestyle." Man's responsibility then is explained away. Words such as "sin", and "judgment", and even "hell" are considered obsolete and are rapidly being dropped from the vocabulary of modern man. Sadly, some preachers no longer speak against sin.

Sin, however, is not imaginary or trivial. It's real. Its consequences are so great that Christ had to come and die to free us from them. If we allow sin to overcome us we'll lose our souls and separate ourselves from the God who made us. All sin is more than offensive to God; it's rebellion and must be punished. Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

People who realize the seriousness of sin, grieve over it, and want to leave it, and they repent. Paul rebuked the church at Corinth, and they repented. He describes this event, "For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:8-10).

God takes note of those who grieve over their sins. David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). David revealed, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). James admonishes us, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:8-10). How long has it been since you were pierced to the heart or wept over your sin?

Scripture describes how the conscience functions. Every person has within his heart this moral voice and governor. Even people who do not realize there is right and wrong have it! Romans 2:14-16 says, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." When people do what is wrong their consciences accuse them and sting. When people do what is right their consciences excuse them. A guilty conscience causes grief, but a good conscience provides peace.

We should make it our aim to please God, so that we can be at peace with God and with ourselves. Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day" (Acts 23:1). He

said this even though he was once the chief of sinners. When he persecuted the church he was deceived, doing what was wrong while thinking it was right. Yes, the conscience is a moral function of the heart; but it can be deceived by false values. It can believe it's doing what is right, when in reality it's sinning. We must never justify in our hearts what God calls sinful.

God said, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). People lie to themselves about their sins, but the Lord knows. People find others to help them find ways to justify sin, but the Lord knows. I read recently of a person who searched for a lifetime for a way to justify committing a sin. Believing the lie that one can live in sin and still please God this person chose the sin and abandoned being pure. Polluting the heart with sinful desire and false reasoning will lead people into sin and away from God's blessing.

Are we being desensitized by the present evil world? Do things that once shocked us now pass us by with little notice? Have our sexual ethics slackened? What are we watching on our televisions and computers? How much violence and sex did we watch last week? How many murders? Has all the exposure we've had to shameful words and acts caused our consciences to become calloused? Hebrews 3:12-13 warns us, "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."

The world has always been worldly; we shouldn't be surprised. They've always tried to justify sin. They sin and in time don't care at all. Knowing what is wrong they laugh and flaunt their participation in evil. They harden their hearts by wallowing in the sin until the sin no longer stinks to them. Then they get offended when others are bothered by the sin which no longer bothers them! Sinful people want everyone else to join them in their sin.

Our ungodly world despises anyone who exposes sin for what it is. Jesus described it this way, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19-20). This difference between Light and darkness is why the Christian must keep himself free from sin and worldliness.

Second Corinthians 6:14-18 speaks to believers, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I'll be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' Says the Lord Almighty."

Second Corinthians 7:1 continues, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We must rid ourselves of evil hearts and evil lives, and make it our goal to imitate Christ because we do fear the wrath of God against evil. The evil in this world will do everything it can to make us stop loving God. Unless we separate ourselves from worldly ways they will separate us from God! We cannot leave this world, but we don't have to have that worldly way become our ways. Let's live for the Lord and serve Him. Christians are not ruined by living in the world but by the world living in them.

We must seek for purity and holiness in our lives. Psalm 24:3-5 says, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive a blessing from the Lord and

righteousness from the God of his salvation.” The Lord Jesus simply said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Paul told Timothy, “Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). First Peter 1:15 says, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” Of all the blessings that God gives few are as precious as forgiveness and a good conscience. Do you have a good conscience?

The apostle Paul said, “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man” (Acts 24:16). Paul describes what that means, “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). One cannot separate faith from conscience. When you believe in Jesus Christ, and believing in Him means believing what He taught, you realize your conscience follows your faith. When you violate the Lord’s morals or His teaching, your heart and your conscience knows it and will tell you so! When you live for the Lord, your conscience will also tell you so!

First John 3:2-3 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” We need to make it our aim not to sin at all; that’s a tall order! No one is perfect. First John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we’re deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t make every effort to purify our lives. Do you?

The blood of Jesus is what forgives sins. When we place our faith in Christ, repent and turn away from our sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized into Christ, God forgives our sins (Acts 2:38). Won’t you obey the Lord?

Why not focus your heart today on worshiping God at church. Everyone needs a church family. There’s probably a church of Christ in your area. If you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one.

Heaven Rejoices

Have you ever thought about a celebration in heaven? Yes, God our Father and the angels rejoice! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The God of the Bible is the God of salvation and eternal life. He's the God who loves every person and wants what is best for us all. He's the God of peace, the God of mercy, the God of forgiveness, and the God of all comfort. He's also the God of joy, and we can rejoice in Him! God is love, and the God of love rejoices in what is good and right. Love "doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Loving and obeying the truth will bring us joy.

One thing I know about God: He cares for every person who is lost and wants that person to be forgiven. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Some think of God as waiting for us to sin so He can send us to hell; but God takes no pleasure in sending anyone to hell. He sent Jesus to reveal His love, which can bring about tremendous life, those changes that are inside of us that cause us to become new creatures in Christ. God rejoices in our newness of life.

God's joy is not like the passing pleasures of happiness in this life. It's everlasting and full. Psalm 16:11 says, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever." True, abundant life comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our joy forever!

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 15:4-7.

So He told them this parable saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Yes, God loves and rejoices over those who repent.

Let's pray together. "O, Father we're thankful for the gift of repentance, and Father we're thankful that we can change our hearts and change our lives. Give us strength to do so, that we may follow Your will always. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Many in our society don't like to talk about sin, hell, or the need for repentance. No one likes to hear something that they're doing is wrong. People don't like it when you disagree with them about what they think or believe. Some even believe it's cruel to ask them to repent. That was true in the days of the Lord Jesus, and it's true today! Frankly, many people do not realize that God sees repentance differently than we do.

The Pharisees of the first century were arrogant and thought they were better than others. They did everything they could to resist the common people and sinners of that day. Luke 15:1-2 records their actions: "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" They believed if Jesus were truly a prophet, he wouldn't eat with sinners. They knew their traditions, but they didn't know the heart of God. God loves every person and wishes to bring them home to heaven. First Timothy 2:3-4 says as we mentioned, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

This is why God rejoices over every sinner that repents. Just like the shepherd who searches till he finds his lost sheep, the Lord Jesus says, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven

over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Just like the woman who searches until she finds a lost coin, so the Lord Jesus says, “In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

The Lord Jesus tells the heart of a father whose son finally returns penitently after going to a far country and living in sin. Luke 15:22-24 says, “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.” People who live in sin are spiritually dead and separated from God, but those who penitently return to God can have spiritual life once again!

Let’s examine the reasons that God rejoices. First, God desires more than your salvation by love, faith, and obedience; He desires that you repent and change your heart and your ways. God wants you to be born again with a new heart that wants righteousness rather than rebellion, purity rather than impurity, and holiness rather than worldliness. He wants you to be converted from a person who follows after sin into a person who follows the Lord Jesus in purity and holiness. When people place their faith in Christ, repent of their sins and are baptized into Christ, they’re born again in Christ. That begins a new life of devotion to the Lord. Faith, love, and a changed heart and life continue as long as we live.

Second, God rejoices because He puts extreme value on your soul. Your soul is not worthless. The Lord Jesus said, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Your soul is worth much, much more than you may imagine.

First Peter 1:18:19 says “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as the lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

Third, God rejoices that you’ve left a life that is sad, empty, and has no promise. Life apart from God is vain and futile. God wants something better for you than a sinful life. Ephesians 4:17-19 says, “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that’s in them, because of the hardness of their heart, and they have become callous, having given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity, with greediness.” This idea of being ungodly means that God has no place in your heart or life. You don’t know Him, and you don’t care. Ungodly people don’t take God seriously, so they fill their hearts and their lives with godless and wicked ways. You have no future with God but a future with darkness if you’re ungodly. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I see people who do evil things, speak the most unwholesome words, treat others disrespectfully, and live ungodly lives yet still have a necklace with a cross or a cross tattoo on their arms. This confuses everyone about righteousness. It’s as if Jesus Christ means nothing to the way they live. They can live as they please and yet still be considered all right with Christ. This, however, is a fantasy. You can’t live for the world and live for Christ at the same time. To do so is spiritual adultery. You can’t be attached to God and have a worldly life on the side. James 4:4 says to those who want both, “You adulteresses, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? And therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Making an enemy of God is the worst thing that you can do.

Fourth, repentance takes God seriously and hungers for righteousness. We die to the desire for sin when we repent. We convert our hearts and convert our lives. When we recognize the harsh conditions that our sins have made against God and how they’ve caused that, we begin to open our eyes. Sin causes guilt and shame in our hearts. Sin can quickly cause us to be enslaved to habits that destroy our lives. Sin can hurt other people and destroy our relationship with God. As Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short, That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have

made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” Sin causes spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Repentance moves a person to choose to leave everything that’s evil and to do what is right and good. A penitent person stops making excuses and trying to justify his sinful behavior. He’ll be honest with himself. Psalm 51:6 reminds us that God desires truth in the innermost being. God knows when you have sinned, but He wants you to be honest and acknowledge it.

Some in our culture refuse to admit anything is sinful. They don’t realize the harm and confusion they’re causing by claiming something that God condemns isn’t immoral. Nothing could be more harmful or oppressing than to relabel sinful behavior as okay. Do you really think relabeling sin changes God’s mind or His will. We’re not the first to try that; oh, it didn’t work before and it won’t work now! Isaiah 5:20-21 says, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight!”

Our culture has confused the hearts of many. They have often used the word “love” to justify whatever they want to do. Love, however, can’t turn a lie into the truth. Love can’t justify sin. David’s love for Bathsheba didn’t justify his adultery or killing Uriah. Love doesn’t justify fornication in any form. Love doesn’t justify pedophilia or same-sex activity. Again, 1 Corinthians 13:6 says love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.” God rejoices and wants us to rejoice when we are righteous, but God doesn’t rejoice over sinful behavior. Someone says, “Well, God wants me to be happy.” Yes, He does; but God’s happiness comes to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and those who are pure in heart. He doesn’t bless those who take pleasure in sin.

Someone objects, “Well, God is not about judging people.” That view of God is popular but misrepresents God. God is love, but God is also light that is holy, and He’s light that is pure. He will not accept those who walk in sin or darkness (1 John 1:6). Sadly, people lie to themselves when they think they can live in sin and still have fellowship with God. The Lord Jesus said that His words, the things that He’s taught, will judge us on the last day (John 12:48). Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Though some think we should never judge anything, the Lord Jesus said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). Loving others means telling them the truth. The truth is kinder than a lie that causes them to turn from God.

Repentance means that you’ll put to death the sin in your life rather than excuse it. Romans 6:11-13 says, “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Christians should avoid those things that are evil. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.” They don’t want to return to the sin that they left when they repent. Second Timothy 2:22 says, “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

Fifth, repentance opens the door for change and obedience, which leads to salvation and eternal life. God sees our hearts; He sees our repentance and willingness to obey. When we obey, God’s grace becomes deeper, richer, and fuller to us. We begin to understand more fully how deep and wonderful is the love and grace of God. Repentance means we want nothing more to do with sin and everything to do with God. The bitterness that came from recognizing we were lost is replaced with grace and joy for the penitent believer who obeys.

We’ll never know how sweet and marvelous God’s love is until we understand how repugnant and offensive our sins against Him are. The Lord Jesus out of love paid a great price in suffering and dying upon a cruel cross so that we could be freed from the guilt of sin. He wouldn’t have done so if the sin were

not a real danger to our souls. His love protected us from the wrath of God and against sin. His atoning sacrifice allowed us to stop being strangers to God and start being His children. We don't have to fear and dread the Judgment if we're cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. We can have confidence in His love and forgiveness. That confidence will move us to love Him and find the joy of obedience and forgiveness.

Some people think the command to repent is like the old practice of penance, where people punished themselves for their sins. Repentance, however, corrects us and brings healing to our souls, our lives, and our consciences. Though God's grace forgives, God expects us to change our hearts and ways. When grace and repentance work together they bring great healing to our broken lives. We become new people who can stand right with God and have a good conscience. We have no greater joy than knowing we have God's blessing and favor. Are you right with God?

Let's pray. O, Father help us to turn from the evil and turn to the good, to love You and to serve You always. In Jesus' name, Amen."

The prophet Micah knew the value of a heart devoted to God. God wants our hearts to serve Him all our days. Micah 6:6-8 says, "With what shall I come to the LORD, And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?"

God washes away our sins when we're baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16), but a baptism without faith or without repentance will not wash away sins. The New Testament has no record of unbelievers being baptized or the impenitent being immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. The New Testament gives no teaching or example of an infant being baptized, since infants neither believe nor have a reason to repent. The people on Pentecost had a need to repent and were told in Acts 2:38 to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Perhaps you have a need to repent. Won't you repent and be baptized today for the forgiveness of your sins?

Perhaps you were baptized for forgiveness many years ago but have fallen away from the Lord and stopped worshiping at church. You may have allowed sinful thoughts and behaviors to lead you away from God. Why not consider your soul and those whom you love? Come home, penitent, confess your sins, and ask God's forgiveness. Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church today.

Worship with the Church

The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, because He loves people. But many today think church is unimportant. Let's find out what God says about worshipping with a church. We search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life.

Pew Forum researchers say nearly 60 million adults in America identify themselves as having no affiliation with religion. In all there are nearly 100 million Americans who are "unchurched," that is, they haven't been to church in quite a while. Even though they're not going now, most of the unchurched used to go to church. Many folks feel that you can be a good Christian and not associate with any congregation. The Bible, however, places a high priority on active membership in church.

In Psalm 122 David sang, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" David and others would sing this song as they were walking up to Jerusalem to observe the feast. It was a psalm of ascent. Many people would walk for days to worship God. They had no car or chariot, but they wanted to be in the temple in the presence of God.

When brothers and sisters in Christ assemble for worship, they're also meeting with God and with Christ. The church belongs to the Lord; it's His family. Of course, the Lord wants to meet with every member of his family regularly. He loves each of you. When you stop coming to church, the Lord and His people miss you. We're here to encourage you to live the Lord's way.

Our reading today comes from Hebrews 10:22-25.

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Here, the Hebrew writer is encouraging us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

Let's pray together. O, Father, we're thankful that You have been faithful, that Your love is everlasting. Father, help us to be committed to You always, to stay faithful, and to never forsake being with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Recent studies say that large numbers of young adults have stopped attending church. Some find church boring or irrelevant. Some say the church is full of hypocrites or filled with judgmental people. Some don't feel as connected as they would like, and others say they're just too busy to go to church. Life can certainly become difficult, but attending and participating in church offers an amazing opportunity to find spiritual strength and help with the most difficult tasks of life. I want to spend some time responding to some of the objections people give for not going to church.

First, they say there are hypocrites at church. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something that he doesn't intend to be. Yes, there are some pretenders at church; but most people come to church because they love God and want to live good lives. Christians are sometimes weak; everyone sins; but that doesn't mean that they're pretenders or actors. It means they're human. Jesus told the apostles at the garden of Gethsemane, "the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41); and that's still true of people today.

Think with me: before we start pointing fingers at others, perhaps we should look at our own lives. Do you really want to let someone else's behavior separate you from God? It seems much wiser to let God deal with the hypocrites and to make sure that we remain right with God. The Lord Jesus had to

deal with hypocritical Pharisees during His entire ministry, but He never let their hypocrisy keep Him from doing what was right! He kept right on teaching and preaching in the synagogues and loving people. Don't let someone else's sin infect your heart and turn you away from God.

Second, church is boring or is irrelevant, some say. When people use the word "boring," they're describing their perspective or attitude. Any activity can be boring or exciting, depending on the attitude of the person speaking. People usually get out of worship what they put into it.

Give me the Word of God to nourish my soul. David describes the "law of the Lord" in Psalm 19:10 as, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." This inspired psalmist was speaking about the Law of the Old Testament which can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He found them desirable, valuable, and sweeter than honey. He found them so important because they were meaningful to him.

The Word of God should be meaningful to you. It will teach you where you came from, why you're here, and where you're going after this life is over. The Bible has the words of eternal life (John 12:50) and the truth that sets you free (John 8:32). The gospel is the message of grace, hope, peace, and love. It will teach you how to live victoriously in this life and how to face God on the Day of Judgment with confidence. The Bible is God's message of love and truth. It will teach you how to avoid the pitfalls of life and will give you purpose and direction. As the Divine book, the Bible will open the Lord's will for your life. A sincere study of God's Word can never be boring to one who wants to know and to please God.

Third, some say that the people at church are judgmental. It may seem that way, but I want you to think with me. Actually, people everywhere are "judgmental." Have you ever been to a ball game where an umpire made a controversial call? Everyone gets excited about the call. Was he "in" or was he "out"? One group thinks the referee is blind, while the other group defends him. Conservatives judge liberals, and liberals judge them right back. Everyone makes judgments. One of the great ironies of our time is the way people view judging. It goes like this: I can judge you, but don't you judge me!

As for judging, the real basis for making judgments about right and wrong is still God's Holy Word. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (John 7:24). If God calls something sin, it's sin whether we agree with God or not. God knows His will, and He only calls things sinful because they are evil or hurtful. God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

The people at church love others enough to tell them the truth about sin. That's not being "judgmental"; it's being kind. Sin will cause a person to lose his soul. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death." If I care about your soul, I'll talk about sin and salvation. I don't say this to be hateful, but because I know how dangerous sin is to your soul. If I didn't care about you, I'd simply ignore the subject of sin and let you bear your consequences. I'd tell you sin is "no big deal"; "there's nothing to worry about!" To remain silent about sin or to lie about sin is cruel, cruel, cruel, and very uncaring. Telling people the truth about sin is kind. Don't be so quick to judge your neighbor at church.

Fourth, someone says I'm so busy I don't have time for church. When I hear people say this, I find it's usually an excuse. Most people can determine their priorities and their schedules. If you're too busy to add God to your schedule, just remember one day time will be no more. God will require your soul of you, and you'll wish you could go back in time to change things.

The Lord Jesus knew people would be busy making a living and needing food and clothes and shelter. The Lord said, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Putting the Lord first means spending time with Him and His family. We’re going to be at church, and you’re going to worship and to serve Him because you love Him.

The Bible says: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we’ll go to such and such a city, and we’ll spend a year there and engage in business and will make a profit.’ Yet you don’t know what your life will be like tomorrow. You’re just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. And instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:13-17). The right thing to do is to attend worship with a church.

Fifth, some say, “I don’t feel connected.” Some folks find it hard to make friends at church the way that they would like. The best way to make friends is to be a friend. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man that has friends must show himself friendly.” If you come to church, and you are late and then you leave as soon as the final “amen” is said, you’ll probably never make as many friends at church as you’d like. Instead of waiting until everyone comes to you, you reach out to others. Get involved at church in some good work. Learn people’s names. Attend Bible classes. Volunteer.

People say they aren’t as close to God as they used to be. We ask the question, “Who moved?” Did God leave you or did you leave God? People can easily drift away from God and the church. The Bible says, “we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it” (Hebrews 2:1). It’s easy to allow the world and its ways to cause our love for God and His church to grow weak. I hope that you haven’t done that.

Through the years I’ve grown close to a number of people who came back to church after being absent for a long time. They were always so glad they came back. From the time that they left they felt empty and distant from God. They were miserable and spiritually unfulfilled without Him and they needed to find their way home.

When people return to church they find that they grow closer to God. The Lord wishes all people “might grope for Him and find Him, though He’s not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our very being” (Acts 17:27-28). God is the Father of your spirit (Hebrews 12:9). He created you and has heard your prayers all your life. God gave His Son Jesus for your sins because He loves you. He gave you the Bible so that you might know Him and love Him. Church will help you know Him even better.

When people return to church, they find that they improve their personal understanding of what the Bible teaches. The Word of God is an amazing book filled with hope and truth. A lifetime is not enough to know everything the Bible teaches, but many people waste their minds on everything else but this great treasure of spiritual knowledge, found in the Word of God. The Bible 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” (2 Timothy 2:15). If you want to know God’s Word better, attend Bible classes and worship at church.

When people return to church they find help in the religious training of their children. Raising children in our society, that’s nearly a pagan society, is really tough, and parents need all the help they can get. The church provides an environment where people want to serve the Lord and to live righteous lives. Churches provide moral and spiritual examples that make a lasting impact on young lives. Every child needs a church family. Churches provide Bible classes, camps, retreats, and youth gatherings with opportunities to be around other Christian young people.

When people return to church they discover ways of handling daily challenges better than before. The Bible says, “casting all your anxieties (all your little worries) on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). At church you can pray with brothers and sisters in Christ and learn from the Bible how the faithful people of the Bible dealt with their problems. I’ve found people at church are “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14).

Christians everywhere face struggles. They’ve found the comfort of God and are able to comfort others and help them through their struggles. The apostle Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

The church is a blessing to us all. The Bible says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if we lie down together, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). The church can keep you spiritually strong, able to resist all the temptations and pitfalls of life. You need the church. If you’ve wandered away, come home.

Let’s pray together. “Father, we’re thankful that You have given us the church Your kingdom, Your family, a temple. And Father we’re thankful that we can be a part of it, and to be Your children. Help us to be faithful to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking (forsaking is not missing, but quitting) our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Church is where people build each other up spiritually and grow close to God. We all need that strength and encouragement that comes from being around the people of God.

Occasionally I hear of someone who’s had a bad experience at church. Someone has offended them or overlooked them. They react to this disappointment by quitting the church. If someone wrongs you, rather than quitting the church or quitting the Lord, why not try a different approach. The Lord said, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you’ve gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15). This is the Lord’s way.

When you quit church, you’re actually letting something come between you and God. When you push Christ out of your life, you also put your soul in jeopardy. Listen again to Hebrews 10:25 and then 26, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” Don’t push the Savior out of your life. Who else will shed His blood to save you?

God wants to bless you. If you’re not yet a Christian, come to the Lord in faith and come with love by repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord, and by being baptized. In baptism the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to the church. It could be as a Christian you’ve become one of the unchurched. Come back to the Lord, come back to His church. Don’t let your heart grow hard. Come back and find the love of God, and be right with Him.

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. There’s probably a church of Christ in your area. If you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one.

Why Preach the Gospel?

Occasionally people ask why churches win souls to Christ. We're not trying to impose our faith on anyone, but we do want people to know the truth. Today we're asking the question, "Why do churches evangelize?" People wonder why we preach to the lost. In fact, they question if anyone is really lost. One famous preacher said he believed that people who had never read a Bible or heard the name of Jesus were members of the body of Christ and saved anyway because they believed in a God. If this is the case, then there would be no reason to reach out with the gospel. This may be popular thinking, but it's not God's thinking? Is anyone really lost today? Yes. Does it matter whether people ever know the Scriptures? Yes. Does it take the gospel to save? Yes.

For many people, the words "gospel" and "evangelism" are negative words associated with being judgmental. Today, many think that the worst sin of all is to be "judgmental." So, the idea of evangelizing, telling people the gospel of grace and salvation, implies they are lost and in need of saving. This offends them, and so they don't like the idea of evangelizing. They're content to stay where they are and not hear about Jesus from Scripture. I can't think of anything sadder than not knowing about the Lord Jesus or the grace that He offers.

The gospel is by definition "good news" not bad news. Yes, people in sin are lost and need saving; but that's every one of us. Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That's you, that's me, that's everybody! We're all in the same boat, needing the grace of God and salvation. There's no disgrace in saying that we need salvation. What is a disgrace is to claim that we're above sin and have no need for salvation!

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Romans 1:14-17 where he explains his obligation to preach.

I'm under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I'm 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Let's pray together. "O, Father, help us always to listen to the gospel, the good news of Jesus, and help us to be obedient to Your will, and to love you always. In Jesus' name, Amen."

First John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Again, he says in verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." I'm amazed at how some think that everyone is saved, and no one is lost. When I've taught people in one-on-one studies, I use the 'Upon the Rock' Bible study. You can find these studies online at searchtv.org. It often shocks people when they get to Matthew 7:13-14, which says, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." They don't realize most people take the easy road to destruction rather than the narrow road to heaven. The reason for this program is to help people go to heaven and to avoid the road to destruction. We're in the saving business.

For people to be saved, they must first understand and deal with the fact that they are lost. People need Jesus. They don't always know that. They believe if they have a good life, help their neighbor, and pray, they believe they're going to go straight to heaven; but the Bible tells us differently. We must realize that we all need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no

forgiveness of sins.” Jesus shed his blood to save you and me from our sins. First Peter 2:24-25 says Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. For by his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Some people say, “aren’t good people saved?” Acts 10:1-2 tells of a good man. It says, “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.” This good man was devout, generous, and prayerful; but that didn’t save him. He still needed what everyone needs, the grace of God in the blood of Jesus. All his good works, praying, and devotion didn’t take away his sins. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. You can’t find the salvation of your soul apart from Jesus. It takes His blood. The good news is that He loved you enough to die for your sins and to give you eternal life. You can’t earn salvation, you can’t win it, and you don’t deserve it, so God graciously gave you an opportunity to find salvation through grace in the sacrificial death of Jesus.

Romans 5:6-9 says, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” This passage tells us four things about ourselves. First we were weak or helpless, like an infant. We couldn’t save ourselves by ourselves. Second, we were ungodly; that is, we didn’t have God in our lives. Third, we were sinners. We had sinned against God. Fourth, we were enemies of God, and hostile to God’s will.

God loved us anyway. He loved us in our weakness, as ungodly people, sinners and enemies. Who would think of dying for the sins of your enemy? God thought of it! That’s how God is, and what Jesus did! He loves us even when we don’t deserve it. Paul knew this personally. He 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 because I had 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 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 1:12-16). If Jesus could love the chief of sinners and save him, He can also love and save you. He used Paul as an example for all of us, so that He could show His perfect patience and love for us.

What is the gospel? Paul tells us, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are saved, if you hold fast to the word 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, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. And then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all (Paul says), as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). The gospel tells the story of the death, burial, and resurrection, and the appearances of Jesus. That powerful story can impact our souls.

Paul said that he was “under obligation both to Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I’m not ashamed of the gospel, for it’s the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:14-16). The gospel is powerful because it’s God’s good news. It can save because it tells that story of Jesus and tells us what we must do in response to Jesus. Gospel preaching opens the door to the knowledge of God. First Corinthians 1:21 says, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” The gospel message saves! It’s that message of love and grace and hope! And it’s necessary for your soul!

The gospel gives us the opportunity to be forgiven, to change our lives, to have the past no longer held against us, and to be born again. That’s good news! Have you ever wanted a chance to start over, clean and fresh? Let’s stop here for a minute. Think with me. What sins have you committed in your lifetime? Have you lied, or gossiped, cheated, broken a law, lusted, used foul language, coveted, envied, or hated someone? If you made a list of all the sins that you’ve ever committed you might be surprised at how long that list is. If you took your sins seriously you’d probably be ashamed of yourself and wonder how you could have been so evil. Sin is a terrible thing. It offends God, it hurts others, and makes a person feel small in his own eyes. When people sin, they separate themselves from God.

Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” Sin builds that barrier that keeps us from pleasing God. When sin enters our lives, God no longer hears our prayers but turns his face and favor away from us. Sin has eternal consequences as well. Paul said, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

You can’t hang on to sin and expect to be right with God. The good news is the passage doesn’t stop there. First Corinthians 6:11 says, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” You can be washed clean of sin, sanctified or made holy, and justified or declared righteous by the Lord Jesus. No matter who you are or what you’ve done, you can be saved when you’re washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You don’t have to be lost eternally. You don’t have to miss heaven. Because of the grace of Christ, you can find salvation!

What kind of person would I be if I knew how people can go to heaven and live with God eternally but never told anyone? I’d rather tell people the truth about sin and salvation than to remain silent while people are lost in sin. I’d rather point to Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life than leave people on an easy road to destruction and hell. I’d rather say Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12) than leave them ignorantly thinking that they can save themselves some other way. Some people think it’s unkind to tell people about sin; but remaining silent about sin will condemn you eternally. Ignoring the danger of sin is more than unkind—it’s criminal.

The gospel message has God’s power to save. The most important work in all the world is to tell the story of Jesus. We must tell sinful men to respond in faith and repentance to the gospel and be baptized into Christ. I can’t think of anything more important than to hear the gospel and obey it, before it’s everlastingly too late. Today is the day of salvation. Don’t say no to God. Say yes and obey Him.

Jesus Christ died for our sins. He was buried in the tomb on the third day, and God raised Jesus from the dead. His death and resurrection fulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament. Because he died

for our sins we can find forgiveness and live in the grace of God, enjoying every spiritual blessing. Because He arose from the dead we can have life beyond this life, and hope. We can live in heaven with Christ forever. That's great news! When a person dies with Christ and is raised with Christ in baptism, he becomes a new creature; he's born again, free from sin, washed in the way all of those sins gone. You can start over, you can be born again, and when you put your trust in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, confess Jesus as the Son of God and when you are baptized into Christ, you can be washed clean, and start over. So respond to the Lord Jesus, and He will wash away your sins!

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for the gospel message, and we're thankful for the death of Jesus for our sins, and for the resurrection that we might have hope. Father, help us to respond with hearts filled with faith, help us to turn from our sins, and help us always Father to be obedient to Your will, and to love You every day of our lives. Father, we're thankful for good news, and help us to take it deep into our hearts and to believe it. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

How do I unite with Christ and how is it that I can be "in" Christ? Paul answers in Galatians 3:26-27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Faith and baptism are here described as the means to become a child of God and how we put on Christ. Paul makes it even more clear in Romans 6:3-7, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

Every soul needs to hear this good news. Sadly, some people are unwilling to listen or respond to the gospel. Some love their sins or their pleasures too much to give them up. They would rather travel the easy road than travel the narrow one. You may not want to hear sin will cost you your soul, but would you rather that I lied to you? Would you rather hear the truth that sets you free or hear a lie that will please you today but cost you your soul in eternity? Don't risk your soul. Come to the Lord and obey the gospel today.

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one.