

Program Transcripts

June 2025



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

June 2025

Topics subject to change without notice

JUNE 1 – THE ANSWER IS GOD

Someone commits a violent crime in America every 26 seconds and a murder every 36 minutes. Why? Sin has crept in their lives. The problem of sin starts in the heart, and the answer is in the Lord.

JUNE 8 – PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Being in Christ and his kingdom contains a value greater than all others. When one counts the blessings of being a child of God, one quickly sees that being right with God is worth every sacrifice.

JUNE 15 – BORN OF GOD

You've heard that people need to be born again. What does that mean? Some think they are born again when they say a little prayer, but the Scriptures teach that being born again involves being born of water and the Spirit.

JUNE 22 – THE CHURCH

Have you considered the church described in Scripture, the church Jesus built? Did you know that it is the purest and most ancient of all Christianity? While we have many choices of religious groups, we must follow the will of the Lord.

JUNE 29 – BEING A CHRISTIAN

Finding our place and our identity in this world can be a challenge. There is nothing greater, however, than being a true Christian. When people truly belong to Jesus and live according to His will they are a blessing to all.

The Answer is God

Someone commits a violent crime in America every 26 seconds and a murder every 36 minutes. Why? Today, we're exploring the cause of violence and the solution. The Lord's way is a way of love, joy, and peace. It blesses everyone who follows it. Psalm 1:2 tells us about the blessed man. God said, "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." If you want a better world, it begins with you. Don't wait on others. Today, seeking the Lord and meditating on His Word can make all the difference. Learn what God desires from you and then practice it. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). I know you love the Lord and you want to serve Him.

Lately we've seen lots of violence and hearing the word "evil." The nightly news carries story after story of assault, rape, and murder. Violent crime in America has grown dramatically in the last 50 years. According to the FBI, there were 288,000 violent crimes in 1960; but in 2018, there were over 1.2 million violent crimes reported. We've grieved over violent school shootings, terrorist acts, and bombings. We wonder how anybody could be so cruel and hard-hearted.

While some psychologists speak of violent people being mentally disturbed, others say they are evil. Perhaps it takes crime so horrific as this for us to remember that there is such a thing as evil. Postmodern America has spent so much time excusing itself and justifying its sins, it's forgotten how wicked and how evil humans can be. More than anything, we need the teaching and the love of Jesus to change our hearts and to live righteously.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:1-5. Here he's warning Timothy about the evil changes that will take place as time passes.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

From the earliest days, the Bible speaks of the violence in this world. In Genesis 4, God had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering God had no regard. Cain became very angry and his face fell. God warned him, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:6-7). But Cain let his anger grow in spite of God's warning. Verse 8 says, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

What Cain did was evil. He planned to kill Abel out of his jealousy. God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:6). God has always considered taking the life of another as evil. The Lord's Ten Commandments say, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Murder is and has always been wrong. Revelation 21:8 says, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The New Testament warns us not to follow Cain. In 1 John 3:12, the Bible says, "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder

him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." Cain first thought evil and then he put his deadly plan into action. We too must master our thoughts and not allow evil to overcome us.

The Lord Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). The Lord condemns evil in the heart, even if we don't act upon it. Anger, hate, and vengeance is as evil as murder itself. We should not even entertain the idea of harming or slandering another person.

The Lord Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23). Because our inner thoughts affect how we behave, we must be careful to keep our hearts free from evil. We have to decide that we're going to live above ugliness and malice.

According to Jesus, murder begins when people lose respect for another person. Spitting in the face of another, looking with contempt upon another, or releasing one's anger are signs of a murderous spirit. Jesus forces us to consider our thoughts and our words so that we don't allow our anger and hatred to overwhelm us. The Bible says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). We must learn to let go of evil thoughts and be kind to others, even if they're not kind to us.

Evil in the heart leads to the most terrible sins. Even religious people, if they allow jealousy or hatred to build up in their hearts, can do unspeakably cruel things to others. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees were behind the death of Jesus Christ. They chose Barabbas, the criminal, to be spared, while they cried out for the blood of Jesus Christ. They didn't fool Pilate, however. Mark 15:10 says, "For he (Pontius Pilate) perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up."

Why were they envious? First, because Jesus could perform miracles, but they couldn't. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some men ran and told the chief priests and Pharisees. John 11:47-48 says, "So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.'" The second reason came from their fear of losing their livelihood at the temple. They figured it was better for Jesus to die than for them to lose their nation. Many people today do horrible things out of jealousy and envy.

Another cause of hatred is something you might not expect; it's the truth. People don't want the truth told if it exposes their sins. The Lord Jesus said, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). Sinful people want the darkness to cover up their sinful ways. They hate for their sins to be exposed and hate anyone who exposes them.

Herod had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (Matthew

14:4). Herod was grieved about the matter, but Herodias plotted to have John beheaded. An evil person who has hatred in his or her heart has no compassion and will take vengeance into their own hands.

Selfish desire can lead people to commit murder. People who are greedy for power and gold will do anything to eliminate their competition. The Bible says, "When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel" (2 Chronicles 21:4). Lust for power causes people to do horrible things, even to their families. James 3:16 says, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

Unrestrained sexual desire leads to evil. When David lustfully committed adultery with Bathsheba and got her pregnant, it led to many other sins. He tried to cover it up by getting Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to come home to her. When nothing else worked, David arranged for Uriah to die in battle. Nathan, the prophet, told David, "Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites" (2 Samuel 12:9). When we sin against others, we're also sinning against God Himself. If you love God, you'll not allow selfishness to dominate your life.

The apostle Paul listed a number of fleshly sins in Galatians 5. Each of them arises out of selfishness. When people rebel against God and must have their own way they lose sight of everyone else. They grow callous and don't care who they hurt. Paul said, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). People who hold to fleshly sin cannot live with God forever.

We must be careful to set our hearts on serving the Lord rather than living like the world. First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Sinful desire has led many men and women into ruin. Selfishness leads people away from God, and loving God leads people away from selfishness. The answer to evil is God's love.

Paul explains how loving God and loving people leads us away from evil. He said, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). Just as filling your heart with anger and hate leads to sin, filling your heart with what is good and loving leads to righteousness. There's a stark contrast between the person who loves God and his neighbor and the person who loves only himself.

Keeping God in our hearts isn't trivial. It's not a game. It's the most important thing that you can do. It affects your life and the lives of everyone around you. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord. Jude 21 reminds us to keep ourselves in the love of God. When God

is our focus, we love what is right and good; and when we push God out, every evil thing comes into our lives. The Bible says, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32).

Why are we so angry and violent? Why has evil become so prominent? It's because we've forgotten God; we no longer "see fit to acknowledge God." We've stop reading the Bible and worshipping at church; we've convinced ourselves that we're an accident of evolution rather than created beings with intelligent design. We've let sinful behavior politically correct God's Holy Word, so what God calls sin is now morally acceptable. Without shame we've loved darkness and hated light; we've loved sin and blasphemed righteousness. We fill our media with every ungodly thought, every ungodly word, and every ungodly act. We glorify sin and mock righteousness. When we choose to be godless, why should it surprise us that our society becomes wicked? When we reject the love of God, why should it surprise us that we become angry, hateful, and callous?

When we shut God out of our hearts, we let the devil walk in. When God cannot enter our schools, Satan and his followers will. When we can't read the Bible or pray in public any more, why should we be surprised that sin fills our cities? We won't let the Bible into our schools, but we sure want them in our prisons. Shouldn't that teach us something? We need God in our hearts and in our lives.

The solution to violence is this: the love of Jesus must be in our hearts and His teaching in our lives. When Peter cut the ear off the high priest's servant, Jesus healed the man and said, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

The Lord Jesus knew people get angry and are violent. He taught a better way. He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45). If we're to be like God, we will love and even pray for our enemies.

Jesus practiced what He preached. Remember how Jesus prayed when they were crucifying Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The grace of God can even forgive the violent. Peter spoke to the Jews at Pentecost, the Jews who were responsible for the death of Jesus. He said, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus (and then He pointed His finger) whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

They were cut to the heart over their sin and asked what they could do to be forgiven. Peter responded in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When we change our hearts and are baptized, we too can find God's forgiveness. The closer we draw to God, the better our world will be.

Date: _____

What is the title and main subject of this lesson?

What scriptures are referenced within the lesson?

If this lesson includes any main Bible characters, who are they and what are some of their traits?

Why is this message important?

Are there specific things discussed in this lesson that you would like to work on in your personal life?

How would you share this message with others and with whom would you like to share it?

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The Pearl of Great Price

Is there anything so valuable to you that you would sell everything you own to possess it? Today, we will see how valuable Jesus holds His kingdom, that is the church, to be. The gospel of Jesus Christ is God's means of reaching lost souls. Romans 1:16 says, "the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." The Bible gives us great reason to believe in Jesus as the Christ and to love the God who created and sustains us each day. If you believe and you love the Lord, you'll want to obey Him and live for Him all your life.

Years ago, my mother gave Jackie and me a precious treasure that she made with her own hands, a beautiful quilt made from silks and satins. It has bright colors—red, blue, green, gold, pink, and purple. Each stitch, she said, was made with love. I treasure that quilt, not only for its own beauty, but even more so because she made it. I treasure her. Her quilt is valuable in its own right for the materials and the hours that she put into it, but that's not why it's so valuable. To me, it's priceless, an irreplaceable heirloom, made with love.

The Lord too has given us great treasures in Jesus Christ; they're given in love. We have the forgiveness of sin, eternal life, the peace that passes understanding, a home in heaven, the joy of our salvation, and the Word of God to guide us each day. God's treasures are priceless because they affect our souls and they are everlasting. These treasures are available to us, but we must be willing to sacrifice other things in order to possess them. What we give up is hardly worth anything compared to what we gain in Christ. We must take advantage of the opportunity to follow Jesus.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 13:44-46. Here Jesus, in two very brief parables, presents the value of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

There are many kinds of treasures. Some are valuable monetarily; some are valuable to the heart; but I want to talk about the treasures of the soul. These treasures last beyond this life; they're eternal. The treasures of the soul are the real treasures. If you possess them, you have everything. Without them, you have nothing that will last.

First, God, himself, is a treasure. Having a relationship with God is the greatest of treasures. God is our Creator, Savior, our sustainer, our hope, and our life. God loves us, hears our prayers, provides for us, and guides us. Isaiah said, "The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure" (Isaiah 33:5-6). It matters that the Lord God, the one you read about in your Bible, is your God. If money is your god, you'll be disappointed because you can never get enough of it. Solomon said, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it" (Proverbs 15:16). If pleasure is your god, you'll tire of it. If work is your god, what will you do when you get too old to work? The only god of any value is the God who will not perish, the One who is above this physical world—the God of heaven, the God of the Bible—Jehovah God. God is so good to us all.

Second, Christ is a treasure. Paul wrote, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3). There is nothing more precious, more spiritual, wiser, purer, or more loving than simple New Testament Christianity. We’re thankful to God for Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, who brought life and truth and salvation to this world. We may easily say that in Christ we have “A love that can never be fathomed; A life that can never die; A righteousness that can never be tarnished; A peace that can never be understood; A rest that can never be disturbed; A joy that can never be diminished; A hope that can never be disappointed; A glory that can never be clouded; A happiness that can never be interrupted; A light that can never be darkened; A strength that can never be enfeebled; A beauty that can never be marred; A purity that can never be defiled; A wisdom that can never be baffled; resources that can never be exhausted.”

No wonder the apostle Paul, though he was a respected Jew, gave it all up for Jesus Christ. He was indeed a blue blood, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church, blameless, and respected. However, he said, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8). To Paul nothing was more important than knowing Christ.

Christ was on Paul’s heart and his mind day and night. He said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Paul gladly sacrificed himself for the cause of Christ. He didn’t count his life as dear to himself if he could but fulfill the ministry to preach the gospel (Acts 20:24). He said, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). That was the focus of his life—it was his treasure! I hope that it’s also yours. I know that I can’t live without the Lord Jesus in my life.

Third, heaven is a treasure. Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). We live only a short time on this earth, and we must prepare for the time when we cross beyond this life. We must treasure our eternal home. What treasures are you laying up in heaven? They won’t be earthly treasures, but they’ll be heavenly. Perhaps it’s a friend whom you’ve converted to Christ. Perhaps it’s a gift that you gave to the Lord to bless others. It’s only what you give to God that survives this life. Everything else will perish. Your life here is just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Don’t waste your life today by failing to prepare for eternity.

The Lord Jesus told this parable in Luke 12:16-21, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have

ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." You may think you have all the right strings to pull, but there is one that never belongs to you—and that's the string to your soul. You'll either spend eternity with God or without Him. What are you doing with your life?

Fourth, the Word of God is a treasure. Solomon said, "My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:1-6). Solomon spends nearly ten chapters of the book of Proverbs trying to get his son's attention. He wants his son to hear what he has to say, because he realizes what a treasure the truth is.

Solomon said, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it; get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is available to all, but it's not cheap. You have to search it out of the pages of the Bible. The more you study, the greater treasure you'll find there. Many people are spiritually impoverished, because they've never studied the Word of God. They're willing to accept whatever they hear from others, never questioning. If someone tells you a lie and you believe it, you've missed the truth and the wisdom it brings. Acts 17:11 says the Bereans "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." I hope you are also examining the Scriptures.

David said, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). The Word of God treasured up and cherished, has great ability to help us in time of temptation. In Matthew 4, when the devil tempted Jesus, the Lord answered every challenge with a quotation from the Word of God. He boldly told Satan, "It is written." It is written might be better stated or translated, "It stands written." God wrote it, and it's still authoritative, and it's still true, and it still teaches us how to live. The Lord Jesus said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Word of God makes us alive, and it will last. Everybody is interested in things that last. The Lord said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20).

Fifth, the church is a treasure. Some people ignore or put down the church, but how these people think and how Christ thinks are two different things. The church is the Lord's treasure. He treasures the church more than we can imagine. The church is not a building but people. God treasures every member of His church. Peter said to the church, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10). God sees in the

church a people for his own possession. They are precious, chosen, cherished, and beloved. He considers every member of the church a royal priest, called out of the darkness of this world and called into His marvelous light. The church is His means of telling the world about the excellencies of God and of His Christ. God treasures His people, and you can tell how much He values her by what He is willing to give for the church.

Acts 20:28 simply says that Christ purchased the church with His own blood. Christ gave up everything for the church. God can manufacture gold and silver very easily. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Things don't matter to God, but the blood of Jesus is something else. The Lord poured out His blood for the church. We should treasure the things that Jesus treasures and love the church the way Jesus loves it.

The Lord Jesus taught, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46).

Hidden treasures today are rare. In the ancient biblical lands, however, they were common. Israel, which was a land bridge between Egypt and the East, was repeatedly invaded, ravaged, and captured. To protect themselves, people hid treasure in the ground, in walls, in tree trunks, or wherever they could. On some occasions, they died or were captured, and no one knew where the treasure was hidden.

These parables talk about the kingdom, which is the church. I hope you have found the kingdom of God in one of the churches of Christ near you. Become a part of a local church and treasure it. I know the church isn't perfect, but it is divine in origin. When the church lives the way God intended it to live, there's nothing in all the world better and more noble than the church of the Lord. I want everyone to be a member of the Lord's church.

The Lord Jesus said, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:20-21). What matters to you? What are your treasures? I hope that God, Christ, heaven, the Word, and the church are your treasures. I hope you've obeyed the gospel and have received the priceless grace of God.

"How much do you treasure the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of your sins, or the grace of God? Paul said, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul didn't want a gift so great as the grace of God to be taken lightly or thrown aside. He wanted God's grace to matter in how he lived and what he did. Do you?

Are you putting Christ first in your life? Would you give up everything to know Him? Are you worshipping with the church? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying regularly? Have you obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ? You can do that by believing in Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by being baptized into Christ. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church. There is never a better time to obey the Lord than today. Today! Tomorrow may be too late. Don't wait another day to put your life in order. Treasure up God in your soul. Cherish the Lord Jesus, and live a life that honors and pleases Him.



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Born of God

Today we're asking: what does it mean to be "born again" or "born from above"? Is it some kind of "better felt than told" experience? Is it some inner miraculous event that causes us to change, whether we choose to or not? Or, is it a response to the Lord after hearing the gospel? Some speak of "born again" Christians as if they were a special kind; but, the fact is, one must be "born again" to be a Christian at all. And since there's lots of confusion about what it means to be "born again," we need to go back to the Bible and see what God says about being "born again."

Born again...Within the heart of most people is the desire to start over. We see our sinful mistakes and regret our past. And we wish we could start over and do things differently. You know some people even despise the person they've become and wish they could be someone else. Well, the Lord gives us that opportunity, an opportunity to put away the old sinful person and to put on the new man in Christ. Ah, we can change our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior. We can start down a new path with a good conscience and worthy goals. We can become children of God who have the promise of a home in heaven when we follow what God has to say. And today we're going to explore what this means and how this happens.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John chapter 3 verses 1 through 7. And here Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee is talking with Jesus about being born again.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Well those are good things for us to consider as well. Let's pray together. Father we are grateful for Your word that gives us the information we most in order to be right with You. Help us to be good students and follow the things that You teach and do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." The Lord Jesus is indeed the Son of God, but what He told Nicodemus was unexpected. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The repeated words "truly, truly," show He is serious. The word "truly" in Greek is "Amen."

Nicodemus questions, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3 verse 4) Well, Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, should have understood what Jesus was talking about. Gentiles who became proselytes were thought to be "born again" when they were baptized. Nicodemus was not a proselyte. He couldn't imagine being compared to one of them.

But Jesus makes it clear, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' (John 3:5 to 7). Now even a ruler of the Jews needed what Jesus required for eternal life.

Jesus said, "You must be born again." That little word "must" means it's necessary, if you want to please God. "Must" refers to a "moral necessity." Now Jesus later said that he "must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matthew 16 verse 21). You see Jesus saw the cross as necessary. And if you or I enter the kingdom of heaven, we must first be born again of water and the Spirit. And no matter who we are—even Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews had to be born again in baptism to go to heaven.

The baptism of Jesus was a birth of water and the Spirit. Both water and the Spirit were involved. Water is involved, of course, in that baptism is a dipping in water, an immersion. The Holy Spirit is involved through the Word. Peter explains this in 1 Peter 1:22 to 23: "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 abiding word of God."

Without the preaching of the gospel, we would not believe or know what we must do to obey the truth. But it is in obeying the truth that we purify our souls and are born again of the word. The Word is an imperishable seed. It is for all generations. And as a seed, what it produced in the first century, it will produce today. And that's how we know that we're Christians today like they were in the first century; we have obeyed the same gospel that they did.

The gospel produces faith in us. The Bible says in Rom. 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (or the word of God)." And the more we listen to God's Word, the greater our faith will become. One who listens, then, because of faith wants to obey the gospel. It's when that word works in our heart that it brings about change in the life and we become a new person—truly born of the Spirit by His seed, the Word.

The Bible explains this new birth, where we came from, and how God has blessed us in Titus 3:3 to 7: "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He 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, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." We needed God's grace; we needed saving!

And God's grace and mercy saved us. We didn't earn it; God gave us His grace through "the washing of regeneration" and the "renewing by the Holy Spirit." The phrase "washing of regeneration" refers to a washing that causes one to be regenerated, that is, "born again." Now this "washing" is a clear reference to baptism as the time of the cleansing from sin and being born from above. Let me emphasize that it is God who washes us and the Spirit who renews us. We are washed in the blood of Jesus, who died for us. Some people think baptism is a work of men; but in baptism God does the work of cleansing, regenerating, and renewing.

Well, how do we get this new life? Well, the Bible says in Romans 6 verses 3 to 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."

So, to be reborn, one must first die to self and die to sin. Now you're either a servant of sin or a servant of the Lord. And it's only when you're crucified with Christ in baptism that you die to the old man of sin and then can be raised to walk in newness of life—reborn! This is the real meaning of bearing a cross. Jesus said in Luke 9:23 to 24 that, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

Now the new life starts at baptism but it lasts our whole life. When you're baptized, you're born into the family of God. Jesus said in John 1:11 to 13 that, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." By faith in God's word, we obey Christ. We purify our souls by our obedience to the truth.

Again, 1 Peter 1:22 to 25 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable (no) 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." You see the seed that causes our new birth is the word that was preached to us. We don't question if we should be baptized, because the word of God tells us to do so. We do it out of love for God.

When you're born again in baptism, you have newness of life and become a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 17 says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." In Christ the old man of sin has been put away, and a new man in Christ has come to be.

The new birth changes hearts, attitudes, desires and purposes. The new person wants to be like the Lord in all holiness. Ephesians 4:25 to 32 describes this new life and this new way of life, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

You see, Christians leave the fleshly ways and turn to the beautiful of character, because they become like Christ. Paul said in Galatians 5:22 to 24, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." A person who is born of the Spirit walks by the Spirit by following the teaching of the Spirit found in the New Testament.

When a person is born into the family of God, God is his Father. As a Father God protects, provides, guides, instructs, and corrects. God gives His children the privilege of prayer, listening to every request and concern. He not only listens; He answers. In Christ we are deeply blessed. Ephesians 1 and verse 3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Being born into the family of God gives us all the privileges of God's favor and an inheritance. We are fellow-heirs with Christ.

When a person is born into the God's family, the Lord adds him to the church and writes his name in the Lamb's book of life. God says in Ephesians 2:19 to 22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." My friend, you can do nothing more important today than to be born again!

God wants you to be born again and to come into His family. So put your trust in Him, turn away from sin. Publicly confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. And out of love obey Him in baptism. And in baptism you'll crucify the old man of sin and rise to walk in newness of life, freed from sin. Oh yes, that's God working in you. And in Christ you can truly be born again as a child of God!

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so thankful that through Your gospel we can become Your children. That we can be added to Your family, the church, and that we can be an heir with Christ. And Father help us always love You and serve You from our hearts. In Jesus name, Amen.

Being born again changes us entirely. 1 Peter 2 verses 9 to 10 say this about Christians, "But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Oh we turn from being a "nobody" to being "somebody" with God. We turn from darkness to light. We turn from lost to saved.

Some people ask, "Can God really make me over?" You know, they're ashamed of their past and they don't believe they can live the Christian life or change. But there's good news. If you really want to become a child of God—there's room for you in God's heart. The apostle Paul was once Saul of Tarsus, who blasphemed Christ and violently persecuted Christians. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15 to 16, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." Oh, the Lord loves every person on this earth, and the people He died for were all sinners.

Paul continues, "Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." The Lord will also show you patience. You can be saved from all your sins and live eternally. You can go to heaven. How? Well you must be born again, by believing with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing the name of Jesus, and by being baptized (that is immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins). Now that opportunity is yours if you'll take. You'll receive that blessing. Don't just believe, act on your faith—you must be born again.

Date: _____

What is the title and main subject of this lesson?

What scriptures are referenced within the lesson?

If this lesson includes any main Bible characters, who are they and what are some of their traits?

Why is this message important?

Are there specific things discussed in this lesson that you would like to work on in your personal life?

How would you share this message with others and with whom would you like to share it?

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The Church

The church Jesus built belongs to Him. He alone is its Lord and Savior. He alone is the head of the church, which was His body. Everything about the church is founded upon Him. The inspired New Testament reveals the Lord's will for the church that He purchased with His own blood. If we wish to have the Lord's blessing, we must walk with the Lord and be washed in His blood. When we obey the gospel of Christ, as the New Testament teaches, the Lord himself adds us to His church.

Now those who enter His church and live faithfully will enjoy entering the heavenly kingdom in the life to come. Those whom the Lord adds to the church in this life also live under His reign in His kingdom on earth. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Now since the Lord suffered for our sins, shouldn't we surrender our lives to Him and walk in His ways?

Our reading today comes from the gospel according Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 19. And it is here that Jesus first mentioned about building the church.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that Your son Jesus came to this earth to build the church and to purchase it with His own blood. Father help us always to be devoted to You, to be part of Your church and to be actively involved. To do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The Scriptures are clear: the church and the Lord Jesus are unchangeably united. If Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, you cannot be in His church. If you haven't entered the church Jesus built, the one you read about in the New Testament, you need to. The church Jesus built belongs uniquely to Him and no one else. He is the head and the Lord of His church. Now Jesus didn't build thousands of churches with thousands of names, dozens of creeds, and dozens of practices. He built His church and purchased it with His blood. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Now being inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul knew that people would try to change the doctrine and the practices of the church. He warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29 to 32, he said, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Paul said savage wolves would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. When people depart from God and the word of His grace they cease to have an inheritance among the

saved. Now this is why Paul commended God and the word of His grace as the answer to build them up and to keep them strong in the faith. The word of God is always right, always righteous, always pure, and always sure (Psalm 19 verses 7 to 11). Now if you want to be right with God, my friend, go to the Bible. Go to the word of God.

The New Testament contains the new covenant established by the blood of Christ. Now this is the covenant by which men are saved and sanctified today. Those who follow the New Testament are following the Lord Jesus; they're following the most ancient ways. The pure way found in the New Testament doesn't have the corruptions that Paul predicted in Acts chapter 20. At a later time Paul warned Timothy about strange doctrines that cause people to be lost. 1 Timothy 1:3 to 5 says, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Paul challenges Timothy to preach what he knows is right, because people often seek for what they want rather than what they need. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:1 to 4, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance (with their own lust) to their own desires, and (they) will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

I'm amazed people have come to believe myths and human traditions rather than looking to God's written word for their doctrines. You know, I can read of bishops or elders in Scripture, but where do you read about archbishops and cardinals and hierarchies in the church? You see, Jesus is the only head of His church. The Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 23:9, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." In spite of this, religious men wear the title "father." I can read in the New Testament where people sang hymns, but there simply is no command or example of any church in the New Testament worshipping with an instrument of music.

I can read about people weak to sin, but the Bible nowhere teaches that people are totally hereditarily depraved and incapable of believing or repenting. The concept of turning from sin back to God fills the book of Jeremiah. Why even the wicked people of Nineveh repented in Jonah chapter 3! The selfish prodigal son repented in Luke 15! And in Acts 19:19 the people of Ephesus, these pagans who practiced magic burned their books. The people in Thessalonica according to 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 9 "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God."

I once heard a preacher claim that God does the repenting for us, but Scripture holds each of us responsible for our sins. Paul said to the Stoics and Epicureans of Athens in Acts 17 verses 30 to 31, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." God doesn't do the repenting for you; He expects you to take responsibility and repent of your sins.

People claim "once saved, always saved"; but the Scriptures clearly teach people can lose their salvation. 2 Peter 2:20 to 21 says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, (that is they become saved, they obeyed the gospel and) they are again entangled in them (that is these sins these defilement) and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." You

see, sin can harden the heart and cause people to stop believing, according to Hebrews 3:12 to 13. Please don't believe a lie and lose your soul. Turn to the word of God to find the truth.

Now the Lord has only one gospel. The early church was challenged by some Jewish Christians who demanded that the Gentiles who entered the church obey the law of Moses along with the gospel. And by demanding this they were perverting the gospel. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:6 to 9, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble 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 the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one (that) you received, let him be accursed."

You see, whenever people change, edit, add to, or subtract from the gospel of Christ, they risk their souls. Sadly, some changes have become widespread; they have been practiced for centuries. And people continue to follow these changes without realizing that they're following a different gospel that did not come from the Lord but from men. And instead of saying what Peter said on the day of Pentecost, they're salvation comes by merely confessing what you believe and saying a little prayer. Well, this is a stark contrast to the pattern Peter provided on the day of Pentecost to the lost people in his first gospel sermon.

When the people guilty of crucifying Christ asked what to do about their sins, Peter responded in Acts 2:38 to 39, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." The gospel calls us to come to Christ, and this is how we are to respond. You can't be forgiven if you refuse to repent of your sins, and you can't be saved if you aren't baptized, that is immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins. Saul of Tarsus was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Baptism, I tell you, is important, because that is when our sins are forgiven and the Lord adds us to His church. Look at Acts 2:41 and also verse 47.

The English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word, baptidzo, and refers to an immersion. The examples in the New Testament of baptism reveals that baptism required much water (John 3:23) it was a burial and resurrection in water in Romans 6 and verse 4 and Colossians 2 and verse 12. You see, baptism pictured the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and united the baptized with Christ and freed them from sin according to Romans 6:5 to 7. Church historians realize that the early church uniformly baptized by immersion. There's a Greek word for "sprinkle" and that word is rantizo. There is a Greek word for "pour" and that word is cheo. The Greek word for "immerse" is baptizo. And that word is used 117 times in the New Testament, and is never translated as "pour" or "sprinkle." If the Lord had wanted to substitute sprinkling or pouring for baptism, then the New Testament would clearly state this. The one baptism into Christ for the forgiveness of sins is an immersion in water.

Sadly, as time passed, people began to substitute the baptism taught in the Scriptures with substitutes. The first mention of pouring water for baptism is in the Didache, which is usually dated approximately 150 A.D. It would be known as "clinical baptism." Beginning with this early uninspired writing, there are occasional mentions of sprinkling in the general literature of church history on down through the centuries. It was not, however, until the Council of Ravenna, held in 1311 that sprinkling was officially accepted by some religions as a form of baptism. You see, men decided this on their own authority. No one has a right to substitute their practices with what the Scriptures teach.

According to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, people sometimes imagine they are right with God when they aren't. Matthew 7:21 to 27 says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to

Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Now if you want the oldest and purest form of Christianity, then go to the original source. And that is the New Testament, which is inspired and contains the words of the Lord and His apostles.

Let's pray together. Oh Heavenly Father help us always to go back to Your inspired written word for the truth. And to obey it's commands and to follow it's examples. Help us to do Your will out of love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Throughout my ministry of more than fifty years, I've met people who studied the Bible and learned the truth. Many of them had been religious but had never studied the word of God for themselves. They didn't know what the Bible actually taught about what to do to be saved, about the church, and about Judgment Day. They realized that what they had been taught before was different from what they learned in Scripture. They realized that they weren't following the word of the Lord but a doctrine or creed of men developed hundreds of years after the New Testament was written. They realized that they needed to make a change so that they would be right with the living God.

You see they wanted to be wise by building their house on the rock. That happens when people listening closely to the words of Jesus, that they do them. And that's building your house on a rock. You see they saw no value in adding to, subtracting from, or rewriting the words that Jesus spoke to fit a human tradition or the times. There is no substitute for obeying the words of Jesus if your house is to stand on the last day and you enter the heavenly kingdom. The Lord Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Now if you wish to have Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then trust and obey the Lord out of love. Put your faith and trust in Jesus and in the gospel. Recognize the Lord Jesus died for your sins on the cross, was buried, and was raised up by God on the third day. Change your heart and life by repenting of your sins. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. You see, that's what 3000 people did on the day of Pentecost, and God added them to the church.

Date: _____

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Being a Christian

Occasionally I hear of someone going through an identity crisis, wanting to know who he is or to find "himself." The Scriptures help us understand who we are, why we are here, and what will happen to us when this life is over. Acts 17:28 says, "for in Him(that is in God) we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'" I tell you as the offspring of God, we shouldn't see ourselves as worthless beings and realize that Psalm 139:14 says that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." We didn't evolve from animals but were created by God! Let's find our identity as offspring of God himself and seek to become like Christ. That is God's will for us.

Oh there's a big difference between being in Christ and being out of Christ. There's a big difference between being approved of God and not being approved of God. Genesis 1:26 reminds us that we are all created in the image of God, and we should all get in a right relationship with Christ.

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 and there he describes people who are in the body of Christ, the church, and how they are toward God.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Oh what a wonderful thing to be a Christian. Aren't you happy that God makes that possible for all us. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful to be Your people. A people of Your own possession. A holy nation and royal priesthood. And Father we pray that we may always proclaim the excellencies that You have given to us about Your nature and what a wonderful God You are. Father help us to love You, to love each other and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The word Christian is only found three times in the New Testament. Acts 11:26 says "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Some people think this verse refers to the word "Christian" as a term of derision used first by people who weren't Christians. But the word "called" in this verse is a special term referring to what God names and fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 65:15 where God says, "My servants will be called by another name." And so to be called a "Christian," means that one belongs to Christ. And this is a blessing and honor.

The word Christian is used a second time in Acts 26:28. In that passage King Agrippa is replying to Paul's desire to convert him to Christ. And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." Well, Paul replied to Agrippa, "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, (that is a Christian) except for these chains." Well, I feel the same way. I want everyone who hears me to become a Christian and to live for the Lord.

The third time that we find the word "Christian" is in 1 Peter 4 verses 15 to 16. Peter wrote, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." The description "Christian" shouldn't be considered something to be ashamed of. We should glorify God by being named a "Christian" and being called that. It's an honor to wear the name of Christ!

Sadly, many who call themselves "Christian" talk and behave in ungodly ways. Their speech and behavior shame the name of Christ rather than honor it. 2 Timothy 2:19 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.” If we call ourselves Christians, we must realize that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. What we do reflects not only on ourselves but also on our Lord and Savior who died for our sins. Many people reject Christ because of hypocrites who call themselves Christians but are evil. They dishonor the name of Christ.

And sadly, many who think that they're Christians have never entered that relationship. You remember the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 that, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” You see some think that there are many ways of becoming a Christian, but the Lord has only one way to become a Christian. Now becoming a Christian requires hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel out of love. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” One must hear what the Lord says in Scripture, if he is ever to be a Christian.

Now faith is necessary. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” Repentance, also, which is a change of heart and ways, is necessary. The first thing Jesus ever said as a preacher in Matthew 4 verse 17 was “Repent.” Now if we believe, we should not be ashamed to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Romans 10 and verse 10 says, “For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” But we must also be baptized into Christ, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of our sins according to Acts 2 and verse 38.

True Christians follow the Lord and His teaching in the New Testament. They hear and do what the Lord teaches. Sadly, many think that they're Christians but follow human traditions or cultural ways rather than follow the word of God that's written in the New Testament. Let's be people who follow the Lord. The New Testament provides a number of positive statements that help each of us to discover how God sees us and what He made us to be “in Christ”. When a Christian faithfully follows the will of God, many things can be said about him. Now this lesson is not exhaustive, but it does reflect how God sees true Christians.

As a Christian, I am a child of God. John 1:11 to 13 says that, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Being a child of God matters greatly. Romans 8:14 to 17 says, “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” Now the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Ephesians tells of the ancient pagans who after hearing the truth obeyed the gospel. Ephesians 2:19 says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,” God's family. Galatians 3:26 and 7 explains, “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.” We become children of God by believing, repenting, and being baptized into Christ.

Now as a Christian, I am a saint, that is sanctified by the blood of Christ. Some people think only some Christians are saints, but the New Testament doesn't teach that. Some have determined that to be a saint you have to meet certain criteria that they themselves have established. Well, the New Testament calls every person who becomes a Christian a saint. You can read in 1 Corinthians 1:1 to 2, “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

You see, Paul reminded the Corinthians of their former life of immorality, but also helped them to see what God could do to help them become godly people freed from their old sinful life. 1 Corinthians 6:9 to 11 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (and then he says) Such were some of you; but you were washed, (that is when you were baptized) but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." You see, God washed them, made them holy, and made them free from guilt.

As a Christian, I am a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Now in Christ we all have a past, yes, and we were once sinners, yes, but we didn't stay in sin. We repented and were baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We were forgiven and washed in the blood of Christ. Romans 6 and verse 4 says, "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." You see, when we are born of the water and the Spirit, which takes place in baptism, then we're born again and new creatures in Christ!

Colossians 3:1 to 4 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Oh our focus as Christians is to please God and to serve Him. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23 and 4, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

As a Christian, my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 19 to 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." As Christians we must avoid the works of the flesh and embrace the fruit of the Spirit. Paul said in Galatians 5:22 to 24, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

As a Christian, I am created in Christ Jesus for good works. God wants me to become like His Son Jesus. And Ephesians 2:8 to 10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 58 urges us, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil (your labor) is not in vain in the Lord."

The Lord Jesus said to His followers in Matthew 5 and verse 16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Now because of what Christ has done for us, we want to love and serve others. Galatians 6 and verse 10 says, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

As a Christian, I am chosen in God's eyes. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen." 2 Thessalonians 2:14 says that we're called by the gospel. Now many people are called by the gospel. And when people hear the gospel, and believe it, and obey it by being buried

and raised with Christ in baptism, they become children of God and are, from that time forward, chosen. You see, Paul wrote in 1 Peter 2 and verse 9 to 10, But you are a chosen race, Christians, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of GOD; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Because we're God's people, we must live holy and godly lives that honor God and the name of Jesus Christ. We must listen to the Lord and to His word found in the New Testament. We must love the Lord from our hearts and love our neighbors.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father help us all to be faithful Christians who love You and love our neighbor. Who do Your will, who recognized Your grace and what You have done for us. And commit ourselves, to deny ourselves, and take us our crosses daily and to follow You. This is our prayer in Jesus name, Amen.

There's a big difference between being a Christian and not being one. There's also a big difference between being Christians in name only and genuine Christians who love the Lord. Now you might have parents or grandparents who were god-fearing but that doesn't mean that you're right with God. You can worship at church; but if you follow the devil all week, you'll shame the name of Christ. You can claim that you said a sinner's prayer, but that's not how people became Christians on the day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 that, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Many people deceive themselves, thinking that everything is all right with their souls. But Jesus said what He did, not to condemn people, but to help them see what they need to do to change to be right with Him. He was in the saving business, and you know what, so are we. To be saved, you have to do things the Lord's way! After all, He is the Savior and the Lord; and only the Savior and Lord can make the rules of how to be saved. Now if you choose to do it some other way, you're only deceiving yourself.

On the day of Pentecost in the first gospel sermon, the people guilty of crucifying Jesus were pierced to the heart and asked the apostles, "what shall we do?" You see they wanted forgiveness.

And Acts 2:38: Peter is saying, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." You see that's how you are forgiven and that's how you become a Christian. And that's the Lord's way.



Date: _____

What is the title and main subject of this lesson?

What scriptures are referenced within the lesson?

If this lesson includes any main Bible characters, who are they and what are some of their traits?

Why is this message important?

Are there specific things discussed in this lesson that you would like to work on in your personal life?

How would you share this message with others and with whom would you like to share it?

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