



Take
UP
Your
CROSS

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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

APRIL 2 – BEING LOST

Have you considered what it means to be lost eternally? Being lost means being eternally separated from God and from His favor. Many people who think they are saved have not taken the right steps toward salvation.

APRIL 9 – BEING SAVED

There is no greater blessing in life than being saved by the grace of God. Salvation includes many blessings, including redemption, sanctification, justification, atonement, and reconciliation. What a blessing to be saved!

APRIL 16 – BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

The Scriptures teach clearly we are saved by grace and through faith, but they do not teach we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Many people read one scripture but avoid other passages that are just as relevant.

APRIL 23 – TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

The Lord Jesus challenges everyone to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him. What does the Lord mean by this challenge? How do we first take up our cross, and how do take it up daily?

APRIL 30 – CAN A CHRISTIAN BE LOST?

Many people believe in the doctrine of once saved, always saved and do not believe a Christian can be lost. We want to explore what the Scriptures say about our salvation. Is it conditional or unconditional?

Being Lost

Have you considered the high price of being lost eternally? In this lesson we're going to exploring what it means to be lost.

We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Lord Jesus is in the saving business. And He came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19 verse 10). He died on the cross so that we might know His love and be forgiven of our sins. Our Father in heaven desires all people to "be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2 and verse 4).

I can lose many things and still survive, but I cannot afford to lose my soul. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us that, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." When I die, God will determine whether I'll be with Jesus forever. Whether my soul is right with God matters more than any other thing.

Some preachers think nearly everyone will go to heaven and almost no one will be lost, but the Lord said it differently. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 to 14, "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."

Later the Lord says in Matthew 7:21, "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." Now many are lost and they don't know it. They may think they know the Lord, but He will reject them. Will God welcome you into heaven or reject you?

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 3. And here Paul talks about the condition of people who are not yet Christians.

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

It is a very difficult situation for people who are outside of Christ. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we are thankful for the love of Jesus that He shed His blood so that we might forgiveness. Father help us to live for Him, to love Him and to take up our cross and following Him. In Jesus name, Amen.

My greatest desire is to be saved and to live with the Lord Jesus in heaven forever. Being lost would be the greatest loss; it's the loss of everything for eternity! The wrath of God is not some insignificant thing to be ignored. Those who disbelieve will surely wish they had believed. The Lord Jesus said in John 3 and verse 36 that, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Those who don't care will surely wish they had cared enough to prepare for eternity.

The Lord said in Matthew 24:37 to 39, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." We can be so distracted with our present life and ignore what the Lord says, but nobody will doubt when Jesus comes again.

People may think the idea of sin against God is obsolete; but think again. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:29 to 30, "If your right eye makes you stumble (that is sin and fall away from God), tear it

out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." Sin is your enemy not your friend.

Now if you don't have the forgiveness of your sins, my friend, as kindly as I know how to say it, you are lost and in darkness. If you've forsaken Jesus and the church, as kindly as I know how to say it, you're lost. If you have this unresolved sin that's in your life and you refuse to repent, as kindly as I know how to say it, you're lost. These are clear teachings of the Lord Jesus in scripture. And if you're unwilling to forgive others, you cannot receive forgiveness yourself. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 to 15, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Some people presume upon the grace of God, thinking they don't really need to repent. They believe they can continue to sin willfully, and God will save them anyway. Some think they can add to the word of God or take away from it, and God won't mind. 2 John 9 to 11 speaks clearly of a specific false teaching that, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." But what about the deceivers, what the deceivers said about Jesus Christ. What about that. How He didn't come in the flesh (2 John verse 7). Well what he's saying that is an evil thing to teach a falsehood.

When we deceive others by changing another teaching of Christ, we're also speaking something evil and will cause people not to have God but to be lost. When Ephesians 4:4 to 6 says that "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all," well there can't be two bodies or churches, or two Spirits, or two hopes, or two Lords, or two faiths, two baptisms, or two Gods and Fathers. You see that's going too far beyond the teaching of Christ.

True disciples abide in the words of Jesus. The Lord Jesus said in John 8:31 to 32 to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." When you get away from the words of Jesus, you get away from Jesus Himself. When you fall for man-made doctrines, you get away from the truth. Only the truth can set you free from sin. There is a difference between people who think they're disciples and what Jesus calls true disciples.

Now the Scriptures describe the person who has not yet come to Christ for the forgiveness of his or her sins. They're said to be of this world and in darkness. Colossians 1:13 to 14 says about God, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Now the Lord has no desire for people to remain in the domain of darkness.

The Lord told Saul of Tarsus in Acts 26:16 to 18, 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' You see people in darkness are also in the dominion of Satan. They're not forgiven. They are indeed lost and dead in sin.

Many of the things I'm saying were inspired by some points that were preached by my friend and brother, Hugh Fulford. And he talked about if I'm living in sin and lost, I know it in my heart. David, after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed Uriah said in Psalm 51:3 to 4, "For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge." You see I can't plead ignorance about my sins. There are Bibles everywhere that carry the message about sin and salvation, and my conscience also knows.

Even people who don't know God know when they have sinned. Romans 2:14 to 15 explains, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them." You see knowing we have sinned leads to great misery of soul and a feeling of worthlessness. Guilty souls despise what they've done. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 57 verse 21).

Now being lost means losing the blessing, grace, and favor of God. Proverbs 15:29 simply says, "The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous." Again, Proverbs 66 verse 18 which says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." That is he wouldn't hear my prayers. Paul told the Gentiles to remember what their condition was before they became Christians in Ephesians 2 and verse 12 he says, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Wouldn't it be terrible to have no favor with God, to be alienated and separated from Christ? Wouldn't it be sad to have no hope? Wouldn't it be heartbreaking to know that God will not listen to your prayers?

If I am lost, I likely won't be alone. Likely I'll drag other souls down with me. I may even drag the people that I love the most down with me, maybe it's my spouse, or my children, my brothers and sisters, and my whole family. If I choose the world and sin over Jesus, I'll likely influence others to choose the world and to live in sin. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 9:42 that, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea." I tell ya we're all touching each other's lives. And our choices may become our family's choices. I could cause my "little ones" to stumble and fall away from God.

If I am lost and I die lost, I'm lost eternally. The Lord Jesus compared the eternal destiny of the lost to the saved in Matthew 25:46, when He says about the lost, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Now there are only two categories for our eternity: punishment and life. The same word that describes "eternal life" describes "eternal punishment." Each is as long as the other. We sing the words of that beautiful hymn, Amazing Grace: "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun." But if I'm lost, I am lost forever; and ten thousand years won't change anything. If I'm lost, there's no hope of my changing my destiny after this life is over.

Thankfully, we can change our destiny in this life. We can be prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus. And by the grace and power of God and the Lord Jesus we can change our hearts and our ways. When we humble ourselves with contrite hearts, God opens the door for us to come to come back to Him or maybe come back to Him. You know you don't have to be lost and you don't have to stay lost; you can be forgiven and begin a new life. The guilty, sinful prodigal son returned home. Yes he was broken and penitent. But his father opened His arms and welcomed him home.

The Lord Jesus tells us the story in Luke 15:17 to 24: "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will

get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men." "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and he embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand 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."

You may be lost, but you too can be found. You may be dead in your sins, but God can make you alive with Christ and give you newness of life. God won't refuse those who are penitent and contrite. Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." You can have hope in Christ, a hope that this world cannot give you. You can be forgiven and live eternally with Jesus Christ. And you have the opportunity to come to the Lord. Will you?

Let's pray together. Father we pray that each of us may take our sins seriously. To forsake them. And to come to You for Your grace. Knowing that You love us and Father help us always to do Your will. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:24 to 25, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" What could you do if you lost your soul eternally? Nothing. That's why you need to act now in this life. The grace of God is abundant for those who love Him and will do His will. You can't earn salvation; but by refusing to accept God's grace and will for your life, you're going to face the wages of sin, which is death.

The Lord calls us to something better than a guilty conscience and losing our souls. He said in Matthew 11:28 to 30, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Christianity is not an impossible way to live. The Lord helps us.

The Lord said in John 8:51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." We must let the Lord rule in our lives. We must believe and confess He is the Christ, the Son of God, must repent of our sins, and must be baptized in water in His name for the forgiveness of our sins. Now in baptism God graciously washes away sins by the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3 to 7). And that's when we're born again as children of God.

Being Saved

Have you considered the great blessing that God gives in saving you from sin? In this lesson we explore what it means to be saved.

The Lord's Way is indeed the way of salvation. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 19 verse 10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." His love and compassion for those who have strayed morally and strayed from the truth is unquestionable. He seeks the lost and wants to find them, just as a shepherd searches for lost sheep. And I hope you have an open heart and a willingness to listen and change as He calls for you. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

The prodigal son wasn't like the lost sheep or the lost coin; he chose to leave his father and pursue a life of sin. He had to face life's harshest realities before he came to his senses. He thought sin would bring him happiness, but all it brought him was misery. He became ashamed of himself and no longer thought of himself as worthy to be called his father's son.

The father, however, said to his servants, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand 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 (Luke 15:22 to 24). God celebrates when those who are lost are found, and those who are spiritually dead become spiritually alive. Your greatest blessing is to be saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus, but you must answer His call.

Our reading comes from Paul's letter to Titus chapter 3 verses 3 through 7 where he talks about the beauty of our salvation.

"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."

Oh, what a wonderful salvation we enjoy. Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful that be Your mercy and grace with great love that You have opened a door to save us by that washing of regeneration. Father help us to come to You, to take up our crosses and follow You every day. In Jesus name, Amen.

Salvation in Christ affects every aspect of our hearts and lives. We can have no greater blessing than to know and follow Christ. And we follow away from worldliness and we follow into holiness. We must never think salvation doesn't matter. You can't enter heaven unsaved. We all need to be covered by the grace of God, to be saved by the blood of Jesus. And only those whose names are written in the book of life enter heaven. You can't enter your way to heaven; you need the Savior. What will the Savior, Jesus Christ, do for you?

Well, first, in Christ we find redemption. To redeem is "to ransom, to buy back," so as to deliver someone from slavery or a curse. Jesus paid the price of redemption. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 20:28 that, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Peter explains, in 1 Peter 1:18 to 19, "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 of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Jesus redeemed us personally.

1 Peter 2:24 says, “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” He gave his head to a crown of thorns, His face to spit and slaps, His back to a cruel scourging, His hands and feet to nails, and His side to a spear. He was humiliated on the cross and mercilessly mocked, but He endured it all to taste death for every person. And His sacrifice calls us to redemption and to a new life.

Now redemption is a relief from all the wickedness. Titus 2 and verse 14 says that Christ Jesus “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.” You see God wanted something better for you. He wanted you to be pure and zealous for good, not lawless and living in sin. The difference between being lost and being saved is a matter of character and of destiny. The Lord Jesus wants what will bless you and everyone around you rather than what will curse you and everyone you touch.

Our redemption from sin came at a great cost; it was not cheap! And God wants His redeemed souls to live godly lives. Romans 6 verses 12 to 14 says, “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.” When we surrender to God, we find our freedom. And God paid the price to win our release.

Second, in Christ we find justification. Well when Jesus redeemed us through His blood, He also justified us. Now to justify is to “vindicate, to acquit, or to pronounce and treat as righteous.” A justified person has been “set free” from sin or “made pure” from any sin or guilt of sin. Paul explained in Acts 13:38 to 39, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him (Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

In the New Testament the word “just” means that which is fair or right, and this was extended to include efforts to establish righteousness. A justified person is declared innocent or “not guilty.” Justification means I stand right before God, “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. God doesn’t hold me responsible for sin, when I’m justified, because Jesus made me righteous through the sacrifice of His body and blood. A righteous person doesn’t need to fear punishment for his sins. They are forgiven. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses (sins) against them.”

Psalm 103:11 to 12 reminds us, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” The Lord God said in Isaiah 43:25, “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.” When God forgives us, He no longer holds our sins against us. He doesn’t look at us as guilty sinners but as His children who have been cleansed of sin by the blood of Jesus.

Third, in Christ we are sanctified. Now to sanctify means “to set apart for a holy purpose, that is, to make holy.” The “holy” is separated from the common and isolated for God’s service. In Christ we become holy people. The inspired apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9 to 11, “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. (Then he says) Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, (you were made holy) but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The blood of Jesus washes our souls, makes us holy, and declares us guilt free in the name of the Lord Jesus. And what a blessing to belong to Jesus Christ.

Belonging to Jesus, however, demands that we pursue a transformed life. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:19 to 22, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” God didn’t save us so that we could return to sin. He wanted us to pursue what is right and good, living holy lives.

There are two aspects to our sanctification: first that which God does in saving us from sin; and second, that which God expects of us in separating us from sinful ways. 1 Peter 1:14 to 16 says, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Well, how are we to pursue holiness? Well we must know the truth. The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father for His followers in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” The Scriptures define what attitudes and behaviors are holy. When we obey the Word of God, we’re practicing a holy life.

A person who obeys the calling of the gospel becomes holy. A holy person is a “saint.” And everyone who is washed in the blood of Jesus is a saint. The belief saints are some special group of people within the church is a man-made notion. The Scriptures call all people whom God sanctifies saints (1 Corinthians 1 verse 2).

Fourth, in Christ we find atonement with God. The word “atone” means to make amends, to make matters right, to once again please a wronged or offended person, with the result that the people who were at odds with each other are then “at one.” God wants us to live in harmony with Him and with His teaching. The word “atonement” is literally “at-one-ment.” This means we can once again be in agreement with God and be reconciled. Paul reminded the Gentile Christians at Ephesus of their condition before they knew Christ and after they became Christians.

Before they became Christians, Paul said, “Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands— remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Now thankfully, they didn’t stay in that condition. Verse 13 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

After they became Christians, Paul describes them very differently. “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.” Now these holy people are now God’s family, saints, and dwelling with God.

Fifth, in Christ we are reconciled to God. Now the purpose of our salvation is to transform our lives so we may be reconciled to God and live with Him forever. God loves us and wants us to be friends to be in a right relationship with Him. To reconcile means that we’re once again made friends and close to God. Sin separated us and destroyed our relationship with God, but the blood of Christ opens the way so that we can draw close to God once again. And the Bible pictures sin as a barrier, yes, to our relationship with God. But you know what, when we come to Him we can be reconciled. Remember that sin brakes

that relationship. Isaiah 59:1 and 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 (sinful things) have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." God cannot approve of sin, because sin is offensive to Him. Sin is unrighteous and lawless (1 John 3 and verse 4 and 1 John 5:17). Psalm 5 and verse 4 says, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You."

Habakkuk 1:13 says, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." God determines what is sin; and we must not think that we can overrule what God calls sin. We can't continue in sin, we can't ignore God's teaching, and stand in God's favor. Sin destroys our relationship with God and makes us hostile toward the One who will one day be our judge. Sin makes us enemies of God. God, however, wishes to make His enemies His children and to bring them near by the blood of Christ.

Colossians 1:19 to 22 says, "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (that is in Jesus), and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." The death of Jesus is a demonstration of God's surpassing love, which restores our relationship with God. God has acted in Christ so that we are no longer enemies of God. Be reconciled to God by believing in Christ, loving Him, and obeying Him.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You have opened the door for us to be reconciled to You. Help us to take up our crosses and follow You. In Jesus name, Amen.

The wages of sin is death and eternal separation from God. The Lord couldn't be a righteous God if He simply overlooked sin and took us to heaven anyway. Deuteronomy 32:3 to 4 says, "For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He." You see the Lord hated sin but He loved mankind to such an extent that He sent His Son as a sacrifice to atone for their sins.

Now your salvation cost the Son everything; your salvation isn't cheap. He suffered as no one should suffer and died as no one should die to save you from sin. Now being saved isn't trivial; it matters! Jesus asked in Mark 8:36 to 38, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Now if you wish to be saved, put your faith in Jesus Christ and in His word. Repent of your sins. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Be baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 verse 38). When you're baptized, God washes away your sins by the blood of Jesus, makes you holy and guilt free, and adds you to His church. Come to the Savior and do it today!

By Grace Through Faith

The Scriptures teach us that we're saved by grace through faith, but is that all it teaches? Let's look deeper into salvation by grace through faith.

If we're saved at all, we're saved by the grace of God. Without God's grace, we'd be lost in sin and have no hope. One thing is sure, that no one can say to God, "You owe me salvation and blessing." No one can earn salvation. And we're saved because Jesus paid the price on the cross to save us. Someone has taken the word "G-R-A-C-E" and made the acrostic "God's Redemption at Christ's Expense." Yes He paid the debt that you couldn't pay. He redeemed you from the terrible consequences of sin by suffering on the cross for you.

1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." The punishment that we deserved was laid upon Him. Isaiah described His death in Isaiah 53:5 to 6, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."

Our reading today comes from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 to 10. Here he describes what it means for our salvation by God's gift. Yes it's a wonderful gift to be saved. Let's read.

"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."

Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that by Your grace and Your love that You have provided for our salvation. Help us Father always to put our trust and faith in You and in what You have done for us. This our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

There can be no doubt! We are saved by grace. The word grace means "favor." One who has the love, blessing and favor of another may be said to be in the "good graces" of his benefactor. The distinguishing factors of God's grace are twofold: first, God's grace is a gift and not earned; and second, God's grace is undeserved. Grace is not a wage for our labors, a prize for our winning a competition or an award for our meritorious efforts. No it's a gift. And when a man can earn no wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award, yet receives an amazing gift, he's been given unmerited favor or undeserved kindness. Grace describes the favor of God and all the joy, love, and blessing from His hand.

When you mention to some people that salvation is a gift, they think that this is too good to be true. They figure they must earn their way to heaven by doing some great thing. They can't imagine God giving us something so wonderful as forgiveness of sins and heaven.

The Scriptures are clear: God's grace is a gift and not earned. 2 Timothy 1 verse 9 reminds us that God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace." Paul explained it even more clearly in Titus 3:3 to 7, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

God's grace is certainly undeserved. Romans 5:6 to 10 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." Jesus Christ demonstrated God's love by sacrificing Himself upon the cross for us.

What was their condition when He died? Well, they were weak and helpless, not able to save themselves. We were ungodly in their, they were in their ways and so were we, and knew nothing about Jesus in the beginning. They were sinners, offending God daily and enemies of God by their lives. They didn't deserve the price that Jesus paid for their sins, yet Jesus willingly and lovingly cared about their souls and their salvation.

The apostle Paul looked at his own life and said in 1 Timothy 1:12 to 16, "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, (Paul says) of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost (the chief), Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Now if God could save the foremost sinner, my friend, God can save you. God's grace for Paul was not merely his salvation but His ongoing provisions for Paul's ministry. You see, God has perfect patience with us in all our weaknesses and grants us mercy.

We often hear the word "grace," but this word can sometimes be overworked. While the grace of God cannot be earned by our works or deserved, we shouldn't imagine that grace has no necessary means by which God works and no conditions. We are heirs of God's grace. An heir receives his inheritance as a gift. Well that doesn't mean that the giver of that inheritance cannot place conditions on the gift. Conditions don't make a gift any less a gift. Numbers 21 tells the story of the Israelites in the wilderness who grumbled against God. As a result of their lack of trust and love, the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people who bit them, so that many died. When the Israelites confessed their sin and asked Moses to pray God to take away the serpents, God told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. "Everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." Do you think merely looking on the serpent, this bronze serpent, earned their healing? No, it didn't; but they had to meet the condition before the gracious blessing of life was given.

When Elisha the prophet told Naaman the leper to go and wash (that is to dip) in the Jordan River seven times to be healed of his leprosy, well Naaman first was furious! 2 Kings 5:13 to 14 says: Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. Did Naaman earn his healing? No. He merely trusted the prophet and acted on that trust. He wasn't clean until he acted.

In John 9, Jesus encountered a man who was born blind. Jesus wanted to heal this man and show the power of God, so that He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he, the blind man, went away and he washed, and he came back seeing (John 9 verses 6 and 7). Now who would argue that

washing in a pool is the same as earning our eyesight? The man earned nothing, but he believed strongly enough to do what Jesus told him to do. Faith is not merely accepting. It is trusting enough to do what the Lord asks us to do!

Some people think the grace of God means I can respond to Him anyway I want. And they consider grace to mean there are no conditions at all. Do you think the blind man would have argued about doing it his own way, if he really wanted to see? Do you think the Israelites would have argued with Moses about looking on the serpent? Naaman at first got mad; but when He did things God's way, his flesh was as clean as a little child. Why does anyone argue about repentance or baptism today? Wouldn't it be better to trust and obey?

When you refuse to obey things God's way, you show that you don't trust the Lord. You're presuming God doesn't care how we do things or whether we obey Him or not. Faith and love obey; love doesn't argue or edit or substitute our own way for God's way. Since the word baptism means immersion, one who loves God will be immersed. He won't substitute pouring or sprinkling water on the head. He will simply, lovingly follow the Lord's instruction. Trust in God means trusting what He says to be true and right.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "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." Now doing your own will is like building your house on sand. When the rains fall and the wind blows, that house will fall. Hearing the word of God and doing it is like building your house on the rock. I tell ya you'll never regret doing the right thing and trusting in the Lord's way.

We're saved by grace through faith. And it takes both. We're not saved by grace alone or by faith alone, but by grace through faith. Grace reflects all that God does in our lives to bring us home to Him. Faith reflects our response of trust, love, and obedience to the grace that He has given us.

You know, faith is one of the conditions of God's grace. We cannot be saved apart from faith. The Lord Jesus said in John 3:17 to 18, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." Now later, the Lord Jesus told the Jews how important it was to believe in Him in John 8:24. Jesus said, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." Hebrews 11 and verse 6 says, "And without faith it is impossible (impossible) to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Now these passages make it very clear that believers may be saved, but unbelievers are condemned.

When we're saved through faith, we must understand it's a responsive faith, an obedient faith. Galatians 3:26 shows this: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (then verse 27 says) For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." You see the faith that saves and responds to the grace is an obedient faith. We're sons of God by faith, but this is a faith that will repent and be baptized. For it's in baptism that we're born again and that we "put on Christ." In baptism God grants to believers all the blessings and favor that goes with being a Christian. What a great God we have! Baptism is not, as Paul said, some work that we do to earn salvation. It is how we lovingly respond in faith.

John 3 and verse 36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Believing in the Son includes the idea of obeying, not to earn salvation but to respond properly in faith. Obedience is not the same thing as earning. Now let's say I had a treasure worth a million dollars hidden in my backyard. And I told you that I would

give it to you, provided that you go and you dig it up. Do you really believe that a few minutes of digging should earn a million dollars?

But, you met the condition for the gift by acting. You didn't earn the gift, you received it by doing what I asked. That's how it is in salvation. We don't earn salvation by repenting or being baptized into Christ; we respond to God's free gift of salvation. We respond out of faith the way God asks. Hugo McCord, a great scholar of the word of God, described "faith" as a package word. And he meant the word included more than merely believing. It represented all of the things that people do in trusting the Lord. And by faith the people in Hebrews 11 acted; they lived their faith! And so should we.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so grateful that You have provided a way that we might be saved by grace through faith. Father we're thankful for the gift and we pray that our trust in You we lead us to be obedient to Your word and to be the kind of people who love You the way You have loved us. This our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

"Grace blesses us when we don't deserve it. Justice gives us what we deserve for our sins. Mercy is not getting what we deserve." We owe everything to God for His mercy and grace. Because of His grace, we don't have to suffer the justice of God's wrath. His justice means that we should have died in our sins, but His mercy and grace rescued us from an eternal punishment. God's grace and mercy permit us to be forgiven and live with Him forever. We don't want to take God's grace for granted. We want to be certain that we stand in His grace. We don't ever want to fall from God's favor and lose His mercy. We love God and want to please Him and live with Him forever.

The Lord Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14 verse 15). And when we fail to keep His words, we show that we don't love the Lord (John 14:24). Keeping commandments doesn't earn salvation; It shows love to the Lord.

God requires us to respond to His love His way by loving Him. We can't make up our own way of salvation. He wants us to believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, to repent of our sins, to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Son, and then to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). By faith we put on Christ when we're baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26 to 27). We can't be in Christ until we put on Christ. And I hope that you'll put Christ on in baptism through faith so that you can enjoy the grace of God. You'll never regret doing the right thing.

Take Up Your Cross

Let us look at the Lord's challenge to take up our cross and follow Him.

Jesus was just 33 years old when he decided to take up a cross and die. He was in the prime of life and health. He was doing so much good and had everything to live for!

Jesus was not given a cross; He took it up! He chose it! He didn't want to suffer on the cross no. That Mark 14:34 to 36 says: And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

The commitment Jesus made to follow His Father's will was permanent; there was no quitting or turning back. Jesus took up His cross to die for you and for me. The Lord said in John 10:17 to 18, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke chapter 9 verse 23 to 26 and we will be listen to the words of Jesus our Lord Himself as He gives us the greatest challenge of life.

"And He was saying to them all, '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. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.'"

That's a reading from God's holy word. Spoken by the mouth of Jesus our Lord. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father give us the strength to deny ourselves, take up our cross and to follow Your Son all of our days. We're thankful Father that He bore the cross for us and Father help us to do our part in Your service. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

When the Romans crucified a slave or criminal, they put a wooden beam on the victim's neck and bound to his arms. The slave was then required to march through the neighborhood with a sign proclaiming his crime. They intended to humiliate the transgressor. The phrase "to bear or carry the cross" was the phrase used in describing what's taking place here during the punishment—the victim is literally bearing the cross to the place where he was crucified. In Luke 9, we learned we too must take up a cross—it may not be like the one that Jesus bore, but it is a cross.

You might ask how we first take up a cross, our cross. The answer lies in Romans 6:1 to 7. Here Paul was reminding the Romans of their need to put away their old sins and live the new life that God had given them. Paul explains, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."

When you repent, you're intentionally deciding to leave the old life behind and to take on a new life in Christ.

When you're baptized into the death of Christ and your old self is crucified with Christ, you're taking up a cross. When you're baptized, your sins are washed away, by the blood of Christ, and you're set free from sin. Now you must die with Christ if you wish to be raised up with Christ. When you're baptized, you're raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so that you might walk in newness of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new (creature or new) creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Now Paul knew that denying himself required spiritual discipline. He knew that he couldn't please himself and serve the Lord. He knew that he needed to keep his body under control in order to win the prize. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:2 to 27, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (or rejected)" Paul didn't think he was above exercising in spiritual ways. He denied his fleshly desires and exercised his spiritual life to serve the Lord. And though he was a preacher, he didn't want to be disqualified.

Paul knew the consequences of sin. You see he wrote in Romans 8:12 to 13 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Dying to ourselves means ceasing to live for fleshly pleasures and our own desires. Jesus first put away His own will and took on the will of the Father. It was this focus that allowed Him to endure His cross. We too have to set aside what our hearts desire and turn to what God wills for us. Jesus had always lived for the will of the Father during his lifetime. And it was natural for Him to set aside His own will for the Father's will.

Now Jesus knew before He took up the cross that He would suffer great pain to take away the sins of the world. He offered His body and His blood as a sacrifice, the just for the unjust, so that we might be saved and have eternal life. Now this was no easy decision. Matthew 26:37 and 8 tells us of His suffering at Gethsemane. And how He told Peter and the sons of Zebede that, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Have you ever faced something so dreadful that you wanted to die rather than face it?

Jesus was willing to be falsely accused and condemned by jealous men who wanted Him dead. Jesus was willing to suffer spit, slaps to the face, slander, lies, and humiliation. He suffered a crown of thorns, ridicule, scourging, and crucifixion. Everything He valued was put to an open shame. He did the Father's will, because it was the right thing to do. He bore the cross because He loved the Father, loved people, and wanted to bring salvation to this world. We would have no hope at all if Jesus hadn't been willing to take up His cross. Have you taken up yours?

Have you taken up your cross today? You know Christianity is a life-long commitment to the Lord and His teaching and His ways. When we commit to the Lord, we also commit to His church. You can't embrace the Lord and reject the church. It's not possible. Remember He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20 and verse 28); He is the head of His body today, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22 to 23); and He is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Now the saved are in the church not out of it. If you wish to be saved, then you must be a member of His church.

When we obey the Lord in faith, repentance and baptism, the Lord adds us to His church. Now the church is described in the Bible and how it was made up of identifiable congregations. When we unite with Christ, we unite with His church. And that means that we owe loyalty to the congregation and to its

leaders where we live. We need faithful brothers and sisters to help us get to heaven, and they need us. We're either helping or hurting others. When we refuse to worship with the church, we may be influencing others to give up on Christ.

Paul described his life in Galatians 2 and verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Being crucified with Christ allows Christ to live in us by faith. Since He gave Himself for us, we should be willing to give ourselves up to Him. It's only when we lose our life for His sake that we find it. You can't be saved by holding on to the old ways of sin and selfishness.

You must give selfishness up for something much better, a life of faith in Christ. "We love because He first loved us (1 John 4 verse 19). 2 Corinthians 5:14 to 15 explains, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

Now taking up a cross daily means attention to our commitment and devotion to the Lord. It means attending church regularly, even when I am tired or there are other activities. It means giving generously when opportunities arise, even when it means a sacrifice. It means keeping obligations, even when I don't want to. It means speaking up for Christ, even when it runs against the tide. It means using my abilities to teach people about Jesus Christ. It means doing what is right even if no one stands with me.

I realize churches are made up of fallible people; but the church's head is Jesus Christ; and He is infallible. The Lord Jesus knew the church would be filled with imperfect people. Before Jesus was arrested, He knew how the twelve apostles would react. One betrayed Him, one denied Him, and all of them scattered. Jesus faced the cross alone but He didn't give up on them or on us. And we shouldn't give up either. Jesus showed grace when we didn't deserve it, and we should show grace to others who don't deserve it too. Jesus forgave us because of who He is. And if we're sons of God, we'll show grace and forgive others (Matthew 5:43 to 48).

Now taking up a cross doesn't mean that we lay it down when it gets hard to bear—Jesus didn't quit bearing the cross when people mistreated him or when the cross was agonizing! He didn't come down from the cross, when they taunted Him. 1 Peter 2:21 to 24 says, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, (that is spoken against) he did not revile in return; but when he suffered, he didn't threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (or righteously). He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, (that is the cross) that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." We too can entrust ourselves to God. 1 Peter 4 and verse 19 says, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

Now instead of getting angry or getting even with others, Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father. When people, even other Christians, treat us shamefully and cruelly, it shouldn't surprise us. When we decide to deny ourselves and take up a cross daily, people will mistreat us like they mistreated Jesus. And just as Jesus didn't give up, neither should we.

1 Peter 4:12 to 14 says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the

name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Verse 16 says that, "if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

Romans 8:31 to 39 asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Denying ourselves, taking up the cross daily, and following the Lord has often cost much; but it's worth it. Paul said in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And he explains in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Oh, heaven is surely worth it all. This life is brief, but heaven will last forever and ever.

Let us pray. Father we're thankful that the Lord Jesus was willing to bear the cross for us. Help us to bear our own cross and to live for You. To deny ourselves and to everyday put You first and to follow You. This is Your will and our pleasure and we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Luke 14:25 to 27 says, "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'" Being a Christian means putting the Lord first, turning from a selfish life to a life of service. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." It's only when we lose ourselves, that we have the opportunity to find Jesus as Lord and Savior.

When was the last time that you took a long, close look at the cross of Christ to see just how much the Lord loves you? He offers His hand and His heart to you and asks you to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Him. You see He wants to be united to you. And you can be united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection, when you're baptized into Christ. He will wash away your sins, add you to His church, make you His child, and give you an inheritance in heaven. He wants to abide with you for life and eternity. Will you put your trust in Him? Will you deny yourself, take up your cross today, and follow Him? Now just as Jesus decided to do the Father's will, so you must decide. Will you come to Him?

Can a Christian be Lost?

Some say that once you become a Christian, you never lose your salvation. Is this true?

The doctrine of "once saved, always saved" suggests the Christian, once truly saved, can never do anything to lose his salvation and be finally lost in hell. This belief says Christians have an unconditional security in Christ. They suggest that any person who appears to be a Christian and falls away was never truly converted in the first place. They say Christians do sin; but when they sin, they are punished in this life and forfeit privileges in heaven but not entrance into heaven.

But is heaven conditional? And salvation conditional? What is a condition? A conditional statement is usually introduced by words such as "if" or "unless." When Jesus said in Luke 13:3 that unless you repent, you will perish, we understand repentance is a condition to keep from being lost. When the Bible says "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6 to 7). You see, there are conditions.

Our reading today comes from the second letter of Peter chapter 2 verses 20 to 22. And here he discusses what happens when people leave the faith and begin going in the wrong direction.

"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them 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. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'"

This is a pretty straight forward statement that a Christian, even if he has known the truth at one point can leave it. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your word which helps us to understand Your will for our lives. Father help us to be willing to listen and to hear all that the word of God says about being saved and remaining saved. In Jesus name, Amen.

The doctrine of once-saved, always saved is built upon the belief that God's grace is unconditional. Some say once grace is given, a Christian cannot lose it. But the doctrine of unconditional security ignores the conditional, qualifying statements in Scripture about whom the grace of God saves. Several passages show our salvation is conditional. And we must remain faithful to God and to His word.

For instance, the Lord Jesus said in John 8:51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death." But what happens if a person stops keeping God's word? The Lord said in John 15:1 to 2, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." Now when a branch in Christ no longer bears fruit, it's taken away. John 15:6 says, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Now this is the end of a Christian who will not bear fruit.

Moreover, how your moral life matters. A Christian who turns to fleshly passions can lose his soul, but one who puts away sin can live with God. Romans 8:12 to 13 says, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if (you) by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." You see morality is a condition of salvation.

The Lord expects His people to hold firmly to their faith. Our salvation depends on it. 1 Corinthians 15:1 to 2 says, "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 being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.” Now if they do not hold firmly to their faith, they will have believed in vain and could lose their salvation.

Colossians 1:21 to 23 says, “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.” Holding firmly to the gospel is a condition of our salvation.

Remaining active in church attendance is a condition of our salvation. In Hebrews 10 verse 25, the inspired writer noted that some Christians had forsaken assembling with the church. In response to this, he said in verses 26 and 7: “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” Yes, a Christian who quits all together on God can lose the blessing of eternal life. God expects us to stay involved in church as long as we're able.

The second epistle of Peter was written to Christians urging them to remain faithful and not to fall away to immorality or to false teaching. 2 Peter 2:20 and 21 says, “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, (now these people are Christians) they are again entangled in them (that is these defilements) and are overcome, (he says) 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” Now this clear Scripture shows that if a Christian gets overcome by sin, he can find himself worse off than before he became a Christian. It would have been better if he had never known the way of the Lord.

In 1 John 1:6 to 7 the Bible says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him (with Jesus) and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Our freedom from sin is conditional on whether we follow the Lord or follow the world. Now, I've presented several conditions that God has placed on our salvation. If there were only one Scriptural condition on this list that would be enough to show that our salvation is conditional.

In addition, the Scriptures warn Christians to remain faithful and committed to the Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:24 to 27, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore (Paul says) I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” Paul knew that he could lose his crown of life if he didn't discipline himself and stay free from sin.

In Galatians 5:19 to 21 Paul warned the Galatian Christians about the deeds of the flesh. He said, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, (that is you Christians in Galatia) that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Now why would Paul forewarn Christians about these sins keeping them out of heaven, if Christians couldn't lose their salvation?

Our commitment to Christ is a lifetime effort. The Lord Jesus said in John 5 and verse 24 that, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Now this passage says the believer possesses eternal life but doesn't say anything about the person who stops believing or stops hearing the word. John 8:51 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death." But what about the person who quits keeping the Word? John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." One has eternal life as long as he believes and obeys. If he stops believing, stops obeying, he can lose that life.

Can a person stop believing? Some think that they can't, but we have an example in Scripture of Israel coming out of Egypt. Study Psalm 106 closely. Psalm 106 verse 12 says, "Then they believed His words; They sang His praise." But verse 13 says, "they quickly forgot His works." And in verse 21 the Bible says, "they forgot God their Savior." Then in verses 24 and 5 says of Psalm 106 it says, "Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe in His word, but grumbled in their tents; They did not listen to the voice of the LORD." Can people stop believing? Well the Israelites did.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus described different kinds of soil: the soil beside the road, the rocky soil, the thorny soil, and the good soil. Now these types of soil describe people's hearts. Jesus tells how the Word of God, or the seed, is planted in the thorny soil and what happened. The Lord said in Luke 8 and verse 13, "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away." You see they stopped believing. And sadly, we've all known people like that. Then those in the thorny soil let God be crowded out all together. And don't let God work in their lives anymore and they don't bring any fruit to fruition.

Now Paul predicted in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 1, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Well, when you stop listening to the Lord and you begin pay attention to others, especially demons and the devil you stop believing. To believe in the Lord Jesus means you believe what He teaches. How can you say you believe the Lord if you won't accept the things that He teaches.

Now consider Hebrews 3:12 to 14, written to brothers in Christ. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, (he says) if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." To fall away is to abandon the Lord willfully and completely. This brother has been deceived and hardened by sin and he's lost his faith. Again, we're partakers of Christ only if we hold firm our faith to the end.

Now at this point someone says well, "Phil, don't you know no one can snatch us out of the Lord's hand? Don't you know that we can never be separated from God's love?" Yes, I well know the two precious promises found in John 10:27 to 29 and in Romans 8:35 to 39. They say that no one and nothing can separate us from God. These verses, however, don't consider what happens to a person who himself decides to separate from God. Jude 21 advises us to "keep yourselves in the love of God"; and John 15:9 to 10 teaches that we must abide in God's love. Now no one else can separate us from God, but we can decide to leave the Lord. And Christians can choose to fall away and abandon God! They can choose to leave God; and, sadly, many have.

Another objects, "If a Christian falls away, he was never truly converted in the first place." How do you know that. Are you sure? You've never changed your mind? The Bible says in Hebrews 6:4 to 6, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have

been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, (they chose to fall away) it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

Now it's clear that these people were once Christians. They were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted or experienced the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. You couldn't have these spiritual blessings outside of Christ. You can't fall away from something unless you were first part of it. And they fell away by willfully rejecting Jesus Christ. And others couldn't get them to repent, because they didn't want to repent. To fall away is a willful choice to abandon the faith all together.

In a different situation Galatians speaks of Christians who followed a different gospel than Paul preached by binding circumcision and the Law on Gentile Christians. Paul said in Galatians 5 and verse 4 “You have been severed from Christ, (well they were once joined) you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Now here are people under the grace of God who fell away from it and severed themselves from Christ. To be severed implies they first belonged to Him. A Christian can fall from grace. And I pray that you won't.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that in Your word You have given us the warnings and given us the truth. And though they may be hard to hear, Heavenly Father help us to be willing to listen to You. To love You and to hold firm to our faith and stay close to You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

God offers pardon for Christians who have sinned. Now even when a Christian strays from the truth, God has a way for him to return to salvation. Like the prodigal son, he can come home.

When Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8 offered money to buy the apostles' gift, Peter rebuked him for his sin. And in Acts 8:21 to 24 Peter said, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” You see God expects Christians to repent of their sins and to ask for forgiveness, if they wish to be pardoned.

The Bible says in 1 John 1 and verse 9 that, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God is faithful to His people. He will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, if we confess our sins, repent of them, and ask for forgiveness. Yes God offers pardon, but there are conditions to our forgiveness.

The same is true for the person who wants to become a Christian. The Lord Jesus offers salvation as a gift to those who believe, who repent of their sins, who confess His name before others, and who are baptized into Christ. Now baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Meeting conditions won't earn you salvation; but if you fail to meet them, you cannot enjoy the grace and blessing of God.