

# Program Transcripts

December 2023



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**December 2023**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **DECEMBER 3 – WATER AND SPIRIT**

What is the difference between the promise of baptism with the Spirit and baptism in water commanded on the day of Pentecost? Are people still being baptized with the Spirit today? What is the purpose of these two baptisms?

## **DECEMBER 10 – MIRACULOUS GIFTS TODAY?**

Does anyone possess a miraculous gift today, by which they can miraculously and immediately heal someone? What were the miraculous gifts given in the first century, and does anyone today have a gift like the apostles possessed?

## **DECEMBER 17 – WHEN YOUR HEART BREAKS**

When our hearts break, we wonder, “Does God really love us?” Many people reject God when they suffer, believing suffering means there is no God. In this lesson we’re exploring the love of God and the value of suffering.

## **DECEMBER 24 – WITH CHRIST**

This world would be lost and in darkness without Jesus Christ. What a blessing we have in Jesus! The difference between having a relationship with Christ and not having a relation is great indeed. There are many values to being with Christ.

## **DECEMBER 31 – A GOOD CONSCIENCE**

All of us possess the moral voice of a conscience within our hearts that tells us when we have done wrong and excuses us when we have done what is right. Whether we have a good conscience or an evil conscience matters!

## Water and Spirit

What is the difference between baptism with the Spirit and baptism in water commanded on the day of Pentecost? Let us look at what the Bible says about the baptism that saves.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3 verses 3 to 7, "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.'"

Being born again requires a birth of both water and the Spirit. You cannot have one without the other. And according to 1 Peter 1:23 and also verse 25, the Spirit causes our new birth through an imperishable seed, "the living and abiding word of God... and this is the word which was preached to you." The water is involved when one is baptized in water as a response to the preaching of the gospel. In baptism we are united with Christ; we are crucified with Him, buried with Him, and raised up with the Lord Jesus to walk in newness of life (Romans 6 verses 3 to 7).

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to Titus chapter 3 verses 4 through 7. And there he'll describe how God saves us.

"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."

That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray. Father we're thankful that through Your love and Your grace and mercy we can be washed and made new. And we pray Father that we will always love You for it and be willing to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Titus 3:5 to 7, which we just read, reveals when and how God our Savior saves us. He does this through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. He does this to justify us by His grace and to make us heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Now the word washing makes us think of Paul's experience in Acts 22:16. Ananias told him, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." The new birth includes both water and Spirit, not Spirit alone. Every ancient author who spoke of being born of water and the Spirit recognized that this passage, John 3 verse 5, and Titus 3:5 was speaking of baptism in water. It was not until the 1500s that anyone suggested otherwise. And this is a clear departure from a correct biblical understanding.

Now being baptized in water is emphasized repeatedly in the New Testament. John the Baptizer baptized in water. Mark 1:4 to 5 says that, "John the Baptist (or Baptizer) appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." John 3:22 to 23 says, "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized." Acts 8:36-says that, "As they went along (that's Philip and the eunuch) as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Acts 8:38 to 39 then it say, "And he (Philip) ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the

Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing." The baptism of the Eunuch was a baptism in water.

Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Now water is clearly involved in this baptismal washing that causes sin to be washed away. 1 Peter 3:21 speaks of the baptism that saves. And it says, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Again, the picture of one of washing away his sins and giving at that time a person a good conscience. Now on each occasion, baptism in water always followed as a response to the preaching of the gospel.

Now the idea of being baptized "with the Holy Spirit" appears five times in the New Testament: John the Baptizer said in Matthew 3 verse 11, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." He asserts this again in Mark, 1 and verse 8. Where he said, "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In Luke 3 and verse 16 John answered and said to the Jews who were asking questions, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

The book of Acts reveals the time when Jesus began baptizing. And how He baptized the apostles with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1 verse 4 to 5 it says, "Gathering them together, (that is the apostle) He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" Well we see this baptism take place, being fulfillment, this prediction fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 verses 1 to 4. It says, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." That's when they received power, that's when they spoke in tongues, and worked many miracles.

The Gentiles were also baptized with the Holy Spirit, but God did this, not to save them, but to convince the Jews that the Gentiles could become Christians. In Acts 11:15 to 18 the bible says, Peter says, "And as I began to speak (this took place before they heard the word and believed), the Holy Spirit fell upon them (that is the household of Cornelius) just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them (that is Cornelius and his household) the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Now if the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles when Peter began to speak, then the Holy Spirit did not cause their salvation at that point. You see, Acts 11:14 says Cornelius called Peter to be brought to Caesarea, "and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household." Cornelius and his household were not saved until after they heard the gospel, not before. Peter said in Acts 10 and verse 47, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And in verse 48 he says, "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." They were baptized in water, a different baptism, and it was for the forgiveness of their sins, just like the people on the day of Pentecost.

So we conclude these things about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. First, John the Baptizer predicted it and contrasted it with his own baptism in water. Second, it was promised by Jesus, as He was discussing the kingdom of God. And third, it was identified by Peter as happening on the day of Pentecost and at Cornelius' house. What happened at Cornelius' house was the same gift. When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius' house, it reminded Peter of the promise that Jesus had made about baptism with the Holy Spirit. And he concluded that God approved of baptizing Gentiles in water for the forgiveness of their sins as well as Jews.

Now several distinctive things separate the baptism with the Holy Spirit from both John's baptism and baptism into Christ. First, baptism with the Holy Spirit was never commanded. It's not something one can decide to do or to receive. It's accomplished by a direct act of God without any prescribed conditions on the part of the one being baptized. No one in the Scriptures ever prayed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And being baptized into Christ, however, is commanded. That is being baptized into Christ through water.

Second, Jesus Himself administered the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Now the apostles couldn't baptize anyone with the Holy Spirit. They couldn't accomplish it by laying on of hands or by prayer. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles and baptized them with the Spirit. He gave it only to the apostles and to the household of Cornelius. And while we realize that many received miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit by laying on of the apostles' hands, we have no record in Scripture of anyone else being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Third, the baptism with the Holy Spirit didn't include salvation in the Scriptures. Fact they're never mentioned together. Baptism with the Spirit had a different purpose than the baptism commanded in Acts 2:38. The purpose of the baptism with the Spirit, to the apostle, was to give the power to work miracles that confirmed their message that it was from God. Hebrews 2 verses 3 to 4 says, "How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will." Once the message was confirmed, it did not need to be confirmed again and again.

The message confirmed was from the Lord Himself and given to the apostles. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth in the first century (John 16:13). If they received all the truth in the first century, then we have no need for some new and different message today. We have all truth from the apostles. The word of God is indeed all-sufficient. 2 Timothy 3:16 to 17 says that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." We do not need a new message in this century.

Baptism into Christ, that is baptism in water, has a different purpose. 1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism also now saves us. On the day of Pentecost, Peter commanded everyone to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Forgiveness of sins is a different purpose. Baptism with the Spirit is not the baptism that saves. The baptism with the Spirit was a temporary promise and only fulfilled on two occasions, whereas baptism into Christ was a practice to last until Jesus returns at the end of time. Even in the case of the household of Cornelius, Peter commanded them to be baptized. And of course that would be in water (Acts 10 and verse 48).

Fourth, baptism with the Holy Spirit was connected to men immediately speaking in foreign languages they had not learned. Their speaking in foreign tongues was a miracle. And these languages were not some sort of ecstatic utterances but were discernible languages (Acts 2 verses 5 to 13) mentions them. Many today who imagine they have spoken in tongues differ with the apostles at Pentecost, who

spoke actual languages to people from other nations. Acts 2 verses 7 to 8 explains, "And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?'" Now many today who claim to speak in other languages are speaking more from their own imaginations than an actual language.

Fifth, baptism with the Spirit had no prerequisites. It was a promise to the apostles and revealed to the Jews that Gentiles such as Cornelius could then hear the gospel, repent, and be baptized. However, those who came for baptism into Christ were first required to confess their faith and repent of their sins.

Sixth, while the Lord Jesus Himself baptized with the Spirit (Acts 1 verse 5), Christ appointed men to make disciples and baptize into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28 verse 19). Baptism into the name of the Godhead is certainly different than baptism with the Spirit.

Seventh, baptism with the Spirit had no name attached to it; but baptism into Christ was attached to the phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ." To do things in the name of Jesus Christ means that you are doing it by His authority. The promise of forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ was a promise for all time and for "all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Let's pray together. Oh Heavenly Father we're thankful that You have given to us an opportunity to respond to the gospel. By faith and repentance and baptism into Jesus Christ. And Father we pray that we will do Your will and serve You always. And it is in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 verse 5 clearly says there is "one baptism." Now baptism with the Spirit was a baptism promised to the apostles and also given to the household of Cornelius in order to convince the Jews that "God has granted to the Gentiles also repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). That baptism was temporary and therefore couldn't be the one baptism for all time. The repentance and baptism that Peter commanded in the first gospel sermon, however, was universal. Acts 2:38 to 41 says, "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." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

When the church began on the day of Pentecost, Peter didn't tell people to say a prayer to be saved. He didn't teach they were saved by faith alone. He didn't teach speaking in tongues brought salvation. He told them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He assured them that this was the calling of the word of God for all time in all places. And it was indeed the one baptism all Christians would experience for the forgiveness of sins. Why not answer the call today?

## Miraculous Gifts Today?

If you watch much religious television, you'll probably see a preacher claim that he can miraculously heal someone just by calling the name of Jesus and touching them. Perhaps you've wondered if they can really do that. Well, stay with us and we'll explore the question in an important Bible study. Today we're asking the question, "Does anyone have the miraculous gifts today?"

There can be no doubt that Jesus and the apostles had the miraculous ability to make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the sick to be healed. They claim to cast out demons. And Jesus could walk on water, multiply the loaves and fishes, still the storms, and raise the dead after they have been buried.

To hear some preachers today, they claim to be able to duplicate some of these miraculous signs. Now, we don't doubt that Jesus and the apostles could do these things, but we want to explore whether people today have those miraculous gifts. Can people today perform miracles like they did in the Bible? Now all these things happened by the power of God in the first century, and some claim they have the gift to make them happen today, but the Bible clearly teaches miraculous gifts would come to an end.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31. And they reveal the primary reason why John wrote this book.

"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

And the word signs here means those miraculous events that pointed to God. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're grateful that You have given us records of the things that took place so many years ago. Things that took place in the minds of many witnesses and Father we're thankful that we can read about them. We pray Father that our faith will always be placed in You. To help us Father always to test the spirits. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

When people claim to be inspired or to work healing miracles, Christians should test these claims. 1 John 4 and verse 1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." Jesus praised the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 and verse 2 for their faithfulness; Jesus told them that He knew "how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."

Religious leaders today who claim miraculous powers cannot measure up to Jesus and the apostles. They cite passages as Mark 16 verses 17 and 18," And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Well people today think they can do what the apostles did.

Well the Lord gave power to work miracles to confirm the preaching of the gospel to the apostles and early prophets of the first century. These miraculous signs guaranteed that they were speaking God's Word. Hebrews 2 verses 3 to 4 says, "After it (that is the message of salvation) was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

Now this confirmation is like a governmental seal upon a legal document; once the confirmation has been made, no additional proof is needed. Now since the preaching of the gospel "was confirmed" in the first century, it no longer needs confirming by miracles again and again. Jesus promised the apostles in

John 16 verses 12 to 13, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." This first-century revelation to the apostles is complete and once for all. God no longer inspires men to reveal new truth. And we have God's complete message from the first century in the New Testament.

Paul said that miraculous gifts were temporary in 1 Corinthians 13. Love would outlast any miracle gift. Paul contrasted the temporary gifts with love that never fails. He declared in 1 Corinthians 13:9 to 10, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." Now the partial things are the prophecy, tongues and miraculous knowledge. These miraculous gifts were to cease when "that which is perfect is come."

Well what is "that which is perfect"? well since "perfect" means "complete," it stands in contrast with that which is partial. Well the "partial" refers to miraculous knowledge and prophecy, which revealed the Word of God orally. It is most natural, then, to realize that the complete or "perfect" is the full revelation given to man in the written record of the New Testament.

This complete revelation of God's will, or as Jude calls it, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), came into general possession about the end of the first century. When the complete revelation of the faith came, the partial, that is the miraculous gifts, were done away with. 2 Peter 1 and verse 3 says that, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." You see we have the complete will of God, and we no longer need more revelation. The Bible is sufficient to teach us all the will of God.

We see a marked difference between what people claim to do today and what the Lord and the apostles could do. Just as there was a difference between Simon the sorcerer and Philip in Acts chapter 8, so today a remarkable difference exists between so-called faith healers and the miracles Jesus and His apostles performed.

If real miracles through spiritual gifts are occurring today, they should be easy to verify. They should replicate the miracles in the New Testament. But are they? We should test the spirits. Many today who claim they were miraculously, instantaneously healed often find later they're not. A woman told me several years ago that a faith healer miraculously healed her ear. And then she said, "But I went to the hospital and had the surgery on my ear anyway just to make sure." Well she didn't realize that the faith healer really had failed to heal her.

Let's compare the New Testament gift of healing and that practiced today by Charismatics; it's really quite revealing.

First, Jesus healed everyone who came to him without fail. Matthew 4:23 to 24 says that, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them."

The apostles were also successful. Acts 5:14 to 16 says, "Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured."



Second, Jesus healed everyone completely; no one came back in a few days still suffering. Crippled persons who had lost arms and legs and eyes were made whole. And the crowd could see immediate physical changes. Matthew 15:29 to 31 says, "After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel."

Now maimed persons were people who had arms or legs missing. To make the maimed whole means that he gave them new arms or legs, new hands or feet. The lame were also physically changed. The Bible describes people whose legs were shriveled or whose foot seemed out of place. And Jesus healed people in a physical, visible ways; and no one could deny it. Who is putting on new arms and legs today? No one! No one.

In Acts 3 verses 1 to 2, Peter and John healed a forty-year-old man who was lame from birth. People had to carry him and lay him at the gate. Acts 3:7 to 10 says, "And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." It's no wonder the leaders in the Sanhedrin said in Acts 4 verse 16, "For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it." Well who is restoring withered limbs today immediately? No one!

Are modern faith healers raising the dead to life? Have they ever visited a fatal accident and restored bodies to life, as Paul did with Eutychus? Eutychus fell out of a window and died (Acts 20 verses 9 to 12); and yet he was completely healed in an instant! Have people today ever simply spoken the dead back to life? Why don't those who claim the gift of healing today heal at the hospitals or cemeteries? Jesus stopped a funeral procession and He gave the widow of Nain her son back. Yes.

While some tell of people who supposedly died and then came back to life, these stories don't tell of a resurrection at the gravesite. No, they usually speak of a person in a hospital who is revived by doctors after a few minutes. If Charismatic healers could raise the dead, like Christ and the apostles did, they could prove it in front of witnesses at the cemetery.

If miraculous healings are still occurring, anyone could record the miracle for all to see. We could see the maimed made whole or the lame limb restored. We could see physical changes immediately. But why is this not happening? Because the supposed healings deal with what you cannot see. The supposed healing today deals with back pain, tumors, or headaches.

Christ restored a man's withered hand; and the "hand was restored" right in front of Christ's enemies according to Luke 6:10 to 11. Jesus restored Malchus' ear that had been cut off, right in front of His enemies (Luke 22:51 to 52). Are modern faith healers restoring amputated limbs? Of course not! Can you go to a healing crusade and observe a withered hand restored? No. If anyone were healing crippled legs, withered hands, cut-off ears, blind eyes, deaf ears, palsy, or hemorrhages like Christ and the apostles did, they would be on the nightly news.

Third, the enemies of Jesus admitted that he could work miracles. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, people ran into Jerusalem to tell the chief priests. Now remember Lazarus had been dead for four days. And John 11:47 to 48 says, "Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like

this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” The enemies of Jesus never questioned his miracles were real.

During his trial, Pilate sent Jesus to King Herod. And Luke 23 and verse 8 says, “Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign (some miracle) performed by Him.” Jesus didn't do His miracles in a corner (Acts 26:26). And Peter could say on Pentecost in Acts 2 and verse 22, “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with (many) mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.”

But today's faith healers often show only the success stories; they don't show the quadriplegics and the paraplegics that are behind who remain in wheelchairs and don't walk. They don't tell the stories of the sick folks that they supposedly healed who were still sick two weeks later.

Fourth, Jesus and the apostles healed people with a word or a touch and prayer. They healed instantaneously and were completely healed. They weren't partially healed or temporarily healed; they were made whole. Jesus didn't require a person to be present at a healing service to be healed. He could speak the word and heal from a distance. Jesus didn't require faith of everyone before He healed them; some He healed didn't believe and others couldn't, because they were dead. Jesus worked miracles to cause people to believe. The miracle then the faith. Jesus never said He couldn't work miracles because unbelievers were present. Jesus never made excuses because He healed everyone. People today claim to be able to heal but fail, and then they make excuses for their failures by pointing to other people's unbelief. My friend, they never had the power to heal to begin with.

Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to be able to distinguish the truth from error. From right and wrong to see what is true and real. And Father to be able to be convinced and be convicted on the things that we know to be true in scripture. But also to see the things that are false in today's world. Helps us always to do Your will in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

My friend, all healing is divine. Healing doesn't require a miraculous gift from God. God also gave us doctors and medicines to bless us because He loves us. We shouldn't think, then, that because miraculous gifts have ceased, God has abandoned us or stopped loving us or stopped answering prayer. Remember: love abides, even when the gifts cease. God loves us in many, many ways and blesses us every day. He gives us life, hope, His Word to believe, the church to strengthen us, our daily provisions, and prayer. Prayer is His listening ear ready to hear our hearts and fill our requests.

While miraculous gifts have ceased, God still hears our prayers and answers them with the answer best for us. Sometimes the answer to prayer isn't immediate healing but the strength to endure. Sometimes God says no, as He did to Paul's thorn in the flesh, because that was what was best for him. Sometimes God gives us something more and better than we ask. One thing is sure: God cares for His people.

The question, then, is, “Do we love God?” Are we willing to commit ourselves to His ways? I'm asking you to put your loving trust in God, turn away from sin, confess the name of Jesus Christ, and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the first gospel sermon and told those who were guilty to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2 and verses 38). Those words are still God's words. And if you'll obey, the Lord He'll forgive every sin. He'll make you His child, He'll add you to His church, and He'll write your name in the book of life. Give yourself to God today and don't delay.

## When Your Heart Breaks

When our hearts break, we wonder, "Does God really love us?" In this lesson we will explore the love of God and the value of suffering.

Annie Johnson Flint was crippled and twisted much of her life with arthritis; and yet from her pain, from the problems she suffered she developed a sensitivity to suffering that helped her to understand and to encourage others who also were suffering. She wrote these words of encouragement: "God hath not promised skies always blue, Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through; God hath not promised sun without rain, Joy without sorrow, Peace without pain. But God hath promised strength for the day, Rest for the labor, light for the way, Grace for the trials, help from above, Unfailing sympathy, undying love."

As Christians, we shouldn't expect God will prevent every problem. People say well, "If God loved us, He wouldn't let us suffer." But those who say such things may be speaking too quickly and may not understand. God may be using a difficulty to produce a greater good. Heartaches teach us the most important lessons. The Bible says in Psalm 119 verse 75, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." The heartaches of life may bring us the greatest good.

Our reading today comes from 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 3 to 5.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."

What a wonderful God we have who helps us even in the hardest times of life. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful for Your love and for Your comfort in our afflictions. Help us Father to be like You and to comfort others. And to always do Your will. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7 verses 2 to 4 that, "It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure."

It's an assumption that the best life is one free from pain. Life free from difficulty is rare, and what seems hard and painful may be what's best for us. I recently received a letter from a prisoner, thanking God that he was imprisoned. Why? Because he found salvation and a better life in prison. He would never have looked for it in the free world. A jail cell and a hospital bed have often led many to change their lives for the better. The psalmist said in Psalm 119 verse 71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes." When your heart aches, life hurts all over. But if suffering has value and can lead to good in a person's life, then we might think of God very differently. Well how is suffering good? Well let me suggest these things:

First, some "good things" can only be brought about in our character by suffering. The pearl, for instances, comes not through ease but suffering. A pearl forms when an irritant, such as a piece of sand, works its way into a particular species of oyster or clam. Now as a defense mechanism, the oyster secretes a fluid to coat the irritant. Layer upon layer of this coating is deposited on the irritant until a lustrous pearl is formed. If there were no irritant, there could be no pearl.

Suffering can help a person know himself, what his character is, and that God can help him endure whatever comes along. Suffering will not only strengthen him; it'll also give him confidence to face the future. Romans 5 and verse 4 says that trials bring about endurance; "and endurance produces character;

and character produces hope.” When God has helped us through one trial, we have confidence that He’ll help us through whatever comes our way.

Paul spoke confidently in Romans 8:28. He said, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Now not all things are good, but God causes all things (good or bad) to work together for good for those who love Him. God can take the heartaches of our lives and use them for some greater good. We may not always know what He’ll do with them, but we can trust that He will use those experiences to bring about good.

Second, suffering can help a person find what is important or valuable. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.” An affliction is something that causes great physical or mental distress. It usually comes through no fault of your own. It can, however, wake us up to what really matters.

You know it's easy to place our priorities out of balance, to emphasize the things that don't matter. Suffering is painful, but it helps us to see what truly matters. Having a flat-screen television isn't nearly as important as being able to see or being able to read the Bible. What really matters in life is whether we're spiritually and physically healthy. The apostle John greeted Gaius this way in 3 John 2, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

The older I grow the more I realize how important my relationship with God is. When we're loneliest, we most value the presence of God our Father in our lives. With the breakdown of the home so prevalent, many individuals are terribly lonely. The number of single adults in America outnumber the married adults.

The Lord Jesus understood loneliness. He never had a wife or children. And Isaiah 53 and verse 3 says that, “He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” When He needed His disciples most, at Gethsemane they weren't there for Him. You remember they slept while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. One then betrayed Him, another denied Him three times, and the others scattered. Jesus went to the cross alone and suffered for our sins alone.

Where did Jesus find His strength? Well, the Lord said in John 16:32, “Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” He stayed close to His Father, and that closeness sustained Him through the hard and lonely times. The Bible says in James 4:7 to 8, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Likewise, Paul drew strength from the Lord. He said in 2 Timothy 4:16 to 18, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Third, suffering teaches us to be thankful for our blessings. A truly hungry person is thankful for something to eat. He's not picky and he won't complain. People who have an abundance are often the first to complain when things aren't perfect. Philippians 2:14 says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Ephesians 5 and verse 20 instructs us, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

Someone says, "What do you mean giving thanks for all things? How can I give thanks for this trouble and heartache that I'm going through? Yes, it's stressful, and painful, and discouraging." I know it's difficult and harsh. When you can't change your circumstances, you can change how you see things. If all you see is the pain, you may forget what God is able to do with that trouble that you're facing. The Bible says in James 1 verses 2 to 4, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

In Acts 5 the apostles were preaching Jesus in the temple. The high priest and the Council heard of it and locked them up. An angel of the Lord freed them and told them to go back to the temple and preach, and they did. The guards arrested them a second time; and the Council rebuked them, and beat them, and told them not to preach in the name of Jesus any more. The Jews usually flogged people with whips or rods. They would hit them repeatedly up to 39 times. The Sanhedrin Council that condemned Jesus meant business with this beating. And it must have been quite painful.

But Acts 5:41 to 42 says, "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." They saw their suffering as one way to show love and devotion to God.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:12 to 16, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you're reviled for the name of Christ, you're blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 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." Perspective matters, and if we see our suffering as a way of showing our devotion, we can rejoice even when we suffer.

Fourth, suffering can teach us compassion for the needs of others. Walking through some difficult experience is rough, but it helps us understand what other people who suffer a similar problem are going through. We've been there, and we know what it's like. And God may be using that heartache to equip us to help someone else who may not be as strong as we are and cannot endure it as well. God's comfort trains us to be a comfort for others.

As we read, 2 Corinthians 1:3 to 5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."

We all need the blessing of someone who understands, someone who can help us work through our struggles, and someone who will pick us up when we stumble. Mistakes and suffering teach valuable lessons, equipping us with the understanding and the compassion necessary to help someone else through a struggle that we have endured. Suffering teaches us the value of kindness in word, a thought or a deed. When we learn the value of receiving kindness, we know how valuable it is to give kindness.

Fifth, suffering can open our hearts and it can give us the value of prayer and Bible study. Suffering reminds us of God. Some people never think about God until some great need comes in their lives. But it's a great day when we realize how much we need God all the time. We need Him in good times as well as in bad. And it's just as important to understand God is listening to our prayers in one situation as it is

another. The psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:153, "Look upon my affliction and rescue me, For I do not forget Your law."

During the Civil War a friend of Abraham Lincoln was a visitor to the White House. And the visitor said, "One night I was restless and could not sleep. . . From the private room where the President slept, I heard low tones. Instinctively I wandered in, and there I saw a sight which I have never forgotten. It was the President kneeling before an open Bible. His back was toward me. I shall never forget his prayer: "Oh, Thou God that heard Solomon in the night when he prayed and cried for wisdom, hear me. . . . I cannot guide the affairs of this nation without Thy help. Hear me and save this nation." Lincoln knew how much he needed God. Do you?

The psalmist said in Psalm 119:143, "Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight." When your heart aches, go to the Word of God. Read God's promises of love, and help, and support to His children. God's promises hold true. You can lose your job, your health, your security, or your friends; but don't ever let go of your God or His promises. Stay close to God.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that You hear our prayers and that You love us so much. And give us the encouragement and the comfort that we need when our hearts ache. And Father we pray that You will continue to be with us. And help us to stay close to You and to do Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen.

We wonder if God really loved us, why does He let us suffer. But love is more involved than merely keeping people from pain. You know some pain is necessary in life. We couldn't survive without some pain. It's our pain and anguish that teach us necessary lessons and make us want to change.

Much of our heartaches come from sin, sometimes the sins of others and sometimes our own. The pain of sin makes us long for righteousness. And bearing the consequences of our sins helps us to understand why sin is so terrible. God doesn't hate sin because He's mean and hateful. He hates sin because He knows how sin ruins the lives of people that He loves.

2 Peter 3 and verse 9 says that, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God doesn't want anyone to be lost in sin; He wants people to change their lives and come to the Lord. Now your struggle today may be the motivation that you need to change your life.

To become a Christian, trust in the Lord with all your heart. God is utterly trustworthy. Turn from your sins. And sin will only lead to more heartache and ruin. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. And be baptized. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Romans 6:3 to 7 teaches baptism unites us with Christ. And in baptism we are buried and raised with Christ. And baptism is the time when the old man of sin is crucified with Christ and we begin to walk in newness of life free from sin. Won't you do that today!

## With Christ

This world would be lost and in darkness without Jesus Christ. What a blessing we have in Jesus! In this lesson we'll explore the blessings in Christ Jesus.

We all have read or heard the beloved Scripture, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." This passage speaks of the greatest gift given to the greatest number of the greatest sacrifice at the greatest cost for the greatest need and the greatest blessing. I can only praise God for the gift of His Son Jesus because He truly loved this world.

When you consider the evil happening in this lawless world, you must wonder how God could possibly love us, want to save us from our offensive sins, and give us eternal life. Yet God cared enough to sacrifice His own Son, even when we didn't deserve it. Jesus Christ has done far more for us than dying on a cross to save us. He gave us a way of life that lifts us up. He is the Prince of Peace, the Savior, and the Lord. He also arose from the dead to assure us there is life beyond the grave. He is indeed the way to the Father in heaven.

Our reading is from Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 11 and discusses the obedience and the love of Jesus Christ.

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

What a wonderful Jesus we have. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that Jesus was willing to suffer and die upon a cross so that we might live to righteousness and die to sin. And Father we're thankful for the hope we have in heaven. We pray Father that You will help us to love You and to always do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

With Jesus Christ we can know what God is like. John 1:18 says that, "No one has seen God at any time," but Jesus "has explained Him." Jesus helps us understand the heart and the character of God the Father. Hebrews 1:1 to 3 says that, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He (that is Jesus) is the radiance of His (that is God's) glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He (that is Jesus) sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." If we want to know what God is like, look at the heart and the character of Jesus, because Jesus is the exact representation of God's nature.

With Christ we can become children 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 (that is, they believe in Him and what He teaches is true), 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." You can be born of God by following the words of Jesus. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, "For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Now with Christ we can see clearly what it truly means to love. When we see how Jesus loves people, cares for their bodies and souls, and sacrifices Himself for their sins, we begin to understand a little better what love is. Romans 5:6 to 8 says, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus loved us when we couldn't save ourselves, when we were ungodly and didn't know Him, and when we were sinners and enemies. Such love is marvelous and surprising.

Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:18 to 19 that we "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." The more we comprehend the love of God, the richer and fuller our lives will be. The Lord Jesus commands that His people love, as He loved. The Lord Jesus said in John 13:34 to 5, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." This world would be so much better if people quit hating and started loving one another.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 22:37 to 40 that, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it that, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." You see they remain the foundation of all that we are in Christ. Loving God and loving our neighbor this will help us to end a lot of the conflict in this world and to find peace.

With Christ we can experience grace and know truth. John 1 and verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh, (speaking of Jesus) and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:16 to 17 reminds us, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Jesus knew we all needed both grace and truth. We needed the mercy and forgiveness found in grace, but we also needed the truth about sin and salvation. Jesus wanted us to become godly people.

In Titus 2:11 to 14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Now grace and truth work together to help us become the "people for His own possession." Grace doesn't leave us where it found us; it transforms us into Christ-like people.

Now learning the gospel truth is how we discover God's grace. It's how we learn from Jesus and how we become like Him. John 8:31 to 32 says that, "So Jesus was saying 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.'" Now listening carefully to Jesus makes us His disciples. Make His word your companion and your focus. Only by remaining in the Word of God can you find the truth that will set you free from sin and its consequences.

The Lord Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." His way is the right way, the narrow way that leads to life. He is the truth that comes from God. And because of this, He can give us life. And no one can come to the Father unless they come through Jesus.



The Lord Jesus told Pilate in John 18:37, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Are you listening to His voice? Have you taken time to study His words for yourself? Test everything by the word of God. You may believe something that doesn't come from the Lord Jesus but from men. The words of men can't lead you to heaven.

They may tickle your ears and sound convincing, but if they aren't God's words and they lack God's power then God's promises are not there. It's only to the faithful who come to God.

With Christ we can leave that moral and spiritual darkness that's all around us. We certainly live in morally confused and broken time where right and wrong are often non-existent. The apostle Paul preached in a pagan society and saw firsthand the futility and the darkness of living outside a knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior. He also knew the beauty of living with Christ as both Savior and Lord. He so contrasts these two lifestyles in Ephesians 4:17 to 24.

Paul said, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

"But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, that you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you become renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." When we put on Christ, we reveal the beauty of holiness and righteousness to a confused world that hardly knows God.

With Christ we would have an example of moral virtue. The Lord Jesus could say to His enemies in John 8:46, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" And though Jesus was tempted by the devil, He never sinned. Hebrews 4:15 to 16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus Christ set for us a pure model to follow. We never have to be ashamed of anything Jesus ever did or anything Jesus ever said. In Christ we are called to purity. He is One that we can imitate!

Ephesians 5:1 to 5 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." The Lord Jesus demands all people everywhere to repent. And you can't follow Jesus and keep on living in sin. And that means His followers stop sinning against God and against you too. If everyone lived righteously, we'd have a better world. A better world begins with you and me living as the Lord desires. And if everyone followed Jesus we'd have a world filled with love and peace and joy and not hate. We could trust each other and not be afraid.

1 Peter 2:21 to 24 says, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no

threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." God wants to heal this sin-sick world of evil. This land of sin and so much hatefulness. And so He was willing to bear the cross to do so. We need to die to sin and live to righteousness. Jesus didn't just die for you; He wanted to transform you into someone with a changed heart and good conscience.

Are you at peace with yourself? Can you look in the mirror and respect the person you have become? Do you have deep regrets and unhappy memories of sins that you've committed? God gave His Son Jesus to give you an answer to a guilty conscience and the shame inside you. The Lord Jesus wants something better for you than a life filled with shame and regret. He wants to point you to a life not only free from sin but also free to pursue kindness and good works. Yes His way is the way of love, the way of graciousness, patience, gentleness, and truth. He stands for everything good and opposes everything evil. He doesn't bend with the times or the culture but He shows the better way for all time. And I hope you'll be the kind of person that will love Him and follow Him and give glory to God.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Jesus and we're so thankful that He came to walk upon this earth so that we might know the difference between good and bad. And might know the truth. Father help us to follow Him, to glorify You and to do Your will always. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The Lord Jesus told His followers who they are and what they should be. The Lord said in Matthew 5:13 to 16, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 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." When people truly follow the Lord Jesus, they are truly the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Now the more you know about the Lord Jesus, the more you love Him and the more you want to be like Him. Please don't pass up the greatest gift of all time, the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Don't cheat yourself out of the blessings that He could bring to your life.

The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Trust in the Lord Jesus, turn from sin and follow Him in repentance. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized God unites you with Christ, adds you to His church, and makes you His child. Please, become a Christian today.

## A Good Conscience

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are we being desensitized by the present evil world? Do things that once shocked us now pass us by with little notice? Have our sexual ethics slackened? What are we watching on our televisions and computers? How much violence and sex did we watch last week? How many murders? Has all the exposure we've had to shameful words and acts caused our consciences to become calloused? Hebrews 3:12-13 warns us, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it's called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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