

## **Evangelistic Bible Study Series**

## Foreword

**2 Corinthians 5:18-20 ISV** All of this comes from God, who has reconciled us to himself through the Messiah and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) for through the Messiah, God was reconciling the world to himself by not counting their sins against them. He has committed his message of reconciliation to us. (20) Therefore, we are the Messiah's representatives, as though God were pleading through us. We plead on the Messiah's behalf: "Be reconciled to God!"

God has called all Christians to be "the Messiah's representatives", helping others to be "reconciled to God". It is incumbent upon Christians to represent the expectations of God accurately. In a religious climate containing countless denominations that profess a myriad of doctrines (many of which are mutually exclusive), it is often confusing for those seeking God to know "what to believe". The following Bible studies were assembled with the intent of providing guidance for those seeking God as well as assistance to those desiring to minister to others. The goal of this series is to present the Gospel in a balanced manner that is consistent with the intent of the following verse:

**2 Timothy 2:15 ISV** Do your best to present yourself to God as an approved worker who has nothing to be ashamed of, handling the word of truth with precision.

The studies are divided into two sections. The first section is intended to capture the essence of the Gospel, providing instruction as to how a person is "born from above", consistent with Jesus's expectation as described in the following verses:

**John 3:5-7 ISV** Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Don't be astonished that I told you, 'All of you must be born from above.'

The second section is intended to provide some foundational teaching for Christians to assist them in fulfilling the intention of the following verse:

**1 Timothy 4:16 ISV** Pay close attention to your life and your teaching. Persevere in these things, because if you do so, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Scripture references are taken from the [International Standard Version](http://www.e-sword.net/) (ISV). The ISV is a moderately literal translation that seeks to avoid the paraphrasing tendencies of some modern versions. It represents a compromise between formal equivalence ("word-for-word" translation) and functional equivalence ("thought-for-thought" translation) by attempting to stay as close to the source text as possible without losing communication. It is one of the most modern English Bible translations available today. A free software version of the ISV translation is available within the e-sword Bible software program, which is also free and is available at the following link: <http://www.e-sword.net/>

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## God's Love for Humanity

**John 3:16-17 ISV** "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his unique Son so that everyone who believes in him might not be lost but have eternal life. (17) Because God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

**Luke 15:11-24 ISV** Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. (12) The younger one told his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between them. (13) A few days later, the younger son gathered everything he owned and traveled to a distant country. There he wasted it all on wild living. (14) After he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. (15) So he went out to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. (16) No one would give him anything, even though he would gladly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating. (17) "Then he came to his senses and said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat, and here I am starving to death! (18) I will get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. (19) I don't deserve to be called your son anymore. Treat me like one of your hired men.'" (20) "So he got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him affectionately. (21) Then his son told him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.' (22) But the father told his servants, 'Hurry! Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let's eat and celebrate! (24) Because my son was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

**Romans 5:6-8 ISV** For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, the Messiah died for the ungodly. (7) For it is rare for anyone to die for a righteous person, though somebody might be brave enough to die for a good person. (8) But God demonstrates his love for us by the fact that the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners.

**Romans 8:31-39 ISV** What, then, can we say about all of this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) The one who did not spare his own Son, but offered him as a sacrifice for all of us, surely will give us all things, along with his Son, won't he? (33) Who will accuse God's elect? It is God who justifies! (34) Who is the one to condemn? It is the Messiah Jesus who is interceding on our behalf. He died, and more importantly, has been raised and is seated at the right hand of God. (35) Who will separate us from the Messiah's love? Can trouble, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, or a violent death do this? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We are thought of as sheep headed for slaughter." (37) In all these things we are triumphantly victorious due to the one who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor anything above, nor anything below, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is ours in union with the Messiah Jesus, our Lord.

**Galatians 4:4-6 ISV** But when the appropriate time had come, God sent his Son, born by a woman, born under the Law, (5) in order to redeem those who were under the Law, and thus to adopt them as his children. (6) Now because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry out, "Abba! Father!"

## God's Love for Humanity

- God demonstrated just how much he loves us by giving us Jesus.
- When we repent and turn back to God, he will “run” to meet us. He loves us deeply.
- Jesus loved us unconditionally by dying for us without any guaranty that we would respond with appreciation.
- God already gave us the best he had to offer – Jesus. Since God is for us, we should not fear because nothing can separate us from God's love.
- God loves us as his children and desires that we approach him with the confidence to address him as “Abba”, which is essentially equivalent to “Daddy”.

Question for Consideration:

How have you responded to God's love?

## God's Desire for Humanity

**Hebrews 11:6 ISV** Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently search for him.

**Proverbs 1:7 ISV** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

**Proverbs 14:26-27 ISV** Rock-solid security is found in the fear of the LORD, and within it one's children find refuge. (27) The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, enabling anyone to escape the snares of death.

**Proverbs 15:33 ISV** The fear of the LORD teaches wisdom, and humility precedes honor.

**Jeremiah 29:11-13 ISV** For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for well-being, and not for calamity, in order to give you a future and a hope. (12) When you call out to me and come and pray to me, I'll hear you. (13) You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13 ISV** "Now Israel, what does the LORD your God desire from you? Only this: fear him, walk in all his ways, love him, serve him with all your heart and in all your life, (13) and observe his commands and statutes that I'm commanding you today for your own good.

**Micah 6:8 ISV** He has made it clear to you, mortal man, what is good and what the LORD is requiring from you—to act with justice, to treasure the LORD's gracious love, and to walk humbly in the company of your God.

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ISV** Let the conclusion of all of these thoughts be heard: Fear God and obey his commandments, for this is what it means to be human. (14) For God will judge every deed, along with every secret, whether good or evil.

**Isaiah 66:1-2 ISV** This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you would build for me, and where will my resting place be? (2) All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But this is the one to whom I will look favorably: to the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my message.

**2 Chronicles 16:9 ISV** The LORD's eyes keep on roaming throughout the earth, looking for those whose hearts completely belong to him, so that he may strongly support them...

**James 1:22-25 ISV** Keep on being obedient to the word, and not merely being hearers who deceive themselves. (23) For if anyone hears the word but is not obedient to it, he is like a man who looks at himself in a mirror (24) and studies himself carefully, and then goes off and immediately forgets what he looks like. (25) But the one who looks at the perfect law of freedom and remains committed to it—thereby demonstrating that he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of what that law requires—will be blessed in what he does.

**James 4:13-14 ISV** Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town, stay there a year, conduct business, and make money." (14) You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

## God's Desire for Humanity

Matthew 6:19-21 ISV "Stop storing up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But keep on storing up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal, (21) because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Mark 12:28-31 ISV Then one of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees arguing with one another. He saw how well Jesus answered them, so he asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of them all?" (29) Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, (30) and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' (31) The second is this: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

- Faith is critical if we desire to please God. He wants us to diligently search for him with all of our hearts.
- Fear of the LORD (reverence) provides a foundation for gaining knowledge and wisdom. It provides guidance that helps us avoid sin and the associated consequences. It leads to humility, which precedes honor and ultimately produces genuine confidence.
- Walking with God is good for us – it helps us avoid unnecessary anguish.
- Justice, gratitude for his love, and humility – these are the things God values most from us.
- God takes notice of those who are devoted to him so that he may strengthen them.
- It is not enough to know God's Word – we must obey it if we hope to benefit from it.
- Our lives are like a mist. We should make choices based on an eternal perspective, seeking treasure that will last.
- Loving God and others should be our greatest priority.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What does it mean to have faith in God?
- 2) What does it mean to fear God?
- 3) What does it mean to "tremble at God's message"?
- 4) How does an awareness of our temporal nature impact our decisions?
- 5) How is "what we treasure" made evident?
- 6) What does it mean to love God and to love our neighbor?

## The Problem of Sin

**Isaiah 59:1-2 ISV** "See, the LORD's hand is not too short to save, nor are his ears too dull to hear. (2) Instead, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have concealed his face from you so that he won't listen.

**Galatians 5:19-21 ISV** Now the actions of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, promiscuity, (20) idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, conflicts, factions, (21) envy, murder, drunkenness, wild partying, and things like that. I am telling you now, as I have told you in the past, that people who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ISV** You know that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God, don't you? Stop deceiving yourselves! Sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, (10) thieves, greedy people, drunks, slanderers, and robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Ephesians 5:3-6 ISV** Do not let sexual sin, impurity of any kind, or greed even be mentioned among you, as is proper for saints. (4) Obscene, flippant, or vulgar talk is totally inappropriate. Instead, let there be thanksgiving. (5) For you know very well that no immoral or impure person, or anyone who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God. (6) Do not let anyone deceive you with meaningless words, for it is because of these things that God becomes angry with those who disobey.

**Matthew 5:21-22 ISV** "You have heard that it was told those who lived long ago, 'You must not murder,' and 'Whoever murders will be subject to punishment.' (22) But I say to you, anyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to punishment. And whoever says to his brother 'Raka!' will be subject to the Council. And whoever says 'You fool!' will be subject to hell fire.

**Matthew 5:27-30 ISV** "You have heard that it was said, 'You must not commit adultery.' (28) But I say to you, anyone who stares at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (29) So if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your body parts than to have your whole body thrown into hell. (30) And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one of your body parts than to have your whole body go into hell."

**James 4:17 ISV** Therefore, anyone who knows what is right but fails to do it is guilty of sin.

**Galatians 6:7-8 ISV** Stop being deceived; God is not to be ridiculed. A person harvests whatever he plants: (8) The person who sows through human means will harvest decay from human means, but the person who sows in the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit.

**Romans 2:5-8 ISV** But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are reserving wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (6) For he will repay everyone according to what that person has done: (7) eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor, and immortality by patiently doing good; (8) but wrath and fury for those who in their selfish pride refuse to believe the truth and practice wickedness instead.

**Hebrews 10:26-31 ISV** For if we choose to go on sinning after we have learned the full truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (28) Anyone who violates the Law of Moses dies without mercy "on



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the testimony of two or three witnesses." (29) How much more severe a punishment do you think that person deserves who tramples on God's Son, treats as common the blood of the covenant by which he<sup>1</sup> was sanctified, and insults the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know the one who said, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will pay them back," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." (31) It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

**Ephesians 2:1-7 ISV** You used to be dead because of your offenses and sins, (2) that you once practiced as you lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient. (3) Indeed, all of us once behaved like them in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and senses. By nature we were destined for wrath, just like everyone else. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us (5) even when we were dead because of our offenses, made us alive together with the Messiah (by grace you have been saved), (6) raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly realm in the Messiah Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might display the limitless riches of his grace that comes to us through his kindness in the Messiah Jesus.

**1 John 3:9-10 ISV** No one who has been born from God practices sin, because God's seed abides in him. Indeed, he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born from God. (10) This is how God's children and the devil's children are distinguished. No person who fails to practice righteousness and to love his brother is from God.

- Our sin creates a barrier that separates us from God. That's why we need a Savior to provide a means by which our sins can be forgiven.
- Sin is serious – it will keep us out of the Kingdom of God if we do not repent.
- We should not let the prevailing view of sin deceive us into thinking that it is not as serious as it really is.
- Heart level sin is just as serious as actual acts – often the only difference between the two is opportunity. Jesus expects us to deal with sin radically, not taking it lightly.
- There are "sins of commission" (things we do) as well as "sins of omission" (things that we should do but don't do). Both are sin.
- We will "reap what we sow".
- The wrath of God awaits the unrepentant.
- Even though we are sinners, God loves us and desires to extend his grace to us for eternity.
- God's children are recognized by their righteousness and love.

### Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What impact has society had on your perspective toward sin and God's standard of judgment?
- 2) How has your attitude toward sin influenced your seriousness about avoiding it?
- 3) How does the biblical view of sin differ from prevailing attitudes in our society today?
- 4) Why does Jesus call us to avoid sin at all costs?
- 5) How does God view our actions when we "fail to do the right we know"?

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<sup>1</sup> The ISV has a primary translation of "it" and a footnote specifying an alternate rendering, "or he". The primary translation indicates that the pronoun "it" is a reference to the blood, which was sanctified by the covenant. The alternate rendering equates the pronoun with the person who was sanctified by the blood. Nearly all English translations, including the modern translations of NIV2011, ESV, HCSB, NET and NASB equate the pronoun with the one who was sanctified. This rendering is considered to be more coherent (and consistent with Romans 5:9); therefore, the alternate ISV rendering "he" is utilized for this verse.

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- 6) What consequences await those who “choose to go on sinning”?
- 7) What hope do the scriptures offer for those who have lived sinful lives?
- 8) How are the “children of God” distinguished from the “children of the devil”?
- 9) How has sin impacted your relationship with God?

Exercise for Further Insights:

Review the scriptures contained in this study that identify various types of sins. Make a list of the types of sins that you have committed. Include “sins of commission”, “sins of omission” and “sins of the heart”. The purpose of this exercise is to develop a clearer understanding of the debt Jesus paid when he died on the cross in your behalf. An awareness of your own sinfulness will enable you to gain a greater appreciation of the “message about the cross”.

## The Message About the Cross

**1 Corinthians 1:18-24 ISV** For the message about the cross is nonsense to those who are being destroyed, but it is God's power to us who are being saved. (19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will reject." (20) Where is the wise person? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? God has turned the wisdom of the world into nonsense, hasn't he? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe through the nonsense of our preaching. (22) Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, (23) but we preach the Messiah crucified. He is a stumbling block to Jews and nonsense to gentiles, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the Messiah is God's power and God's wisdom.

**Isaiah 53:1-12 ISV** "Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? (2) For he grew up before him like a tender plant, and like a root out of a dry ground; he had no form and he had no majesty that we should look at him, and there is no attractiveness that we should desire him. (3) "He was despised and rejected by others, and a man of sorrows, intimately familiar with suffering; and like one from whom people hide their faces; and we despised him and did not value him. (4) "Surely he has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows; yet we considered him stricken, and struck down by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, each of us, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (7) He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he didn't open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, as a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (8) "From detention and judgment he was taken away—and who can even think about his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living, he was stricken for the transgression of my people. (9) Then they made his grave with the wicked, and with rich people in his death, although he had committed no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth." (10) "Yet the LORD was willing to crush him, and he made him suffer. Although you make his soul an offering for sin, He will see his offspring, and he will prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will triumph in his hand. (11) Out of the suffering of his soul he will see light and find satisfaction. And through his knowledge his servant, the righteous one, will make many righteous, and he will bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong; because he poured out his life to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he carried the sins of many, and made intercession for their transgressions."

**John 10:17-18 ISV** This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it back again. (18) No one is taking it from me; I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This is what my Father has commanded me."

**John 15:13 ISV** No one shows greater love than when he lays down his life for his friends.

**Matthew 26:36-39 ISV** Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane. He told the disciples, "Sit down here while I go over there and pray." (37) Taking Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, he began to be grieved and troubled. (38) Then he told them, "I'm so deeply grieved that I feel I'm about to die. Wait here and stay awake with me." (39) Going on a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not what I want but what you want."

**Matthew 26:47-54 ISV** Just then, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. A large crowd armed with swords and clubs was with him. They were from the high priests and elders of the

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people. (48) Now the betrayer personally had given them a signal, saying, "The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him." (49) So Judas immediately went up to Jesus and said, "Hello, Rabbi!" and kissed him tenderly. (50) Jesus asked him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then the other men surged forward, took hold of Jesus, and arrested him. (51) Suddenly, one of the men with Jesus reached out his hand, drew his sword, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. (52) Jesus told him, "Put your sword back in its place! Everyone who uses a sword will be killed by a sword. (53) Don't you think that I could call on my Father, and he would send me more than twelve legions of angels now? (54) How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say this must happen?"

**Matthew 26:59-68 ISV** Meanwhile, the high priests and the whole Council were looking for false testimony against Jesus in order to have him put to death. (60) But they couldn't find any, even though many false witnesses had come forward. At last two men came forward (61) and stated, "This man said, 'I can destroy the sanctuary of God and rebuild it in three days.'" (62) At this, the high priest stood up and asked Jesus, "Don't you have any answer to what these men are testifying against you?" (63) But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest told him, "I command you by the living God to tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God!" (64) Jesus told him, "You have said so. Nevertheless I tell you, from now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (65) Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? Listen! You yourselves have just heard the blasphemy! (66) What is your verdict?" They replied, "He deserves to die!" (67) Then they spit in his face and hit him. Some slapped him, (68) saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you?"

**Matthew 27:15-31 ISV** At every festival the governor had a custom of releasing to the crowd any prisoner whom they wanted. (16) At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. (17) So when the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which man do you want me to release for you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" (18) He did this because he knew that they had handed him over out of jealousy. (19) While he was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him a message. It said, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, because today I have suffered terribly due to a dream I had about him." (20) But the high priests and elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to demand that Jesus be put to death. (21) So the governor asked them, "Which of the two men do you want me to release for you?" "Barabbas!" they replied. (22) Pilate asked them, "Then what should I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" (23) He asked, "What has he done wrong?" But they kept shouting louder and louder, "Let him be crucified!" (24) Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was about to break out instead. So he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Attend to that yourselves." (25) All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and our children!" (26) Then he released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus whipped and handed over to be crucified. (27) Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the imperial headquarters and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. (28) They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. (29) Twisting some thorns into a victor's crown, they placed it on his head and put a stick in his right hand. They knelt down in front of him and began making fun of him, saying, "Long live the king of the Jews!" (30) Then they spit on him and took the stick and hit him repeatedly on his head. (31) When they had finished making fun of him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to crucify him.

**Matthew 27:35-46 ISV** After they had crucified him, they determined who would get his clothes by throwing dice for them. (36) Then they sat down there and continued guarding him. (37) Above his head they placed the charge against him. It read, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." (38) At that time

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two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. (39) Those who passed by kept insulting him, shaking their heads, (40) and saying, "You who were going to destroy the sanctuary and rebuild it in three days—save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (41) In the same way the high priests, along with the scribes and elders, were also making fun of him. They kept saying, (42) "He saved others but can't save himself! He is the king of Israel. Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. (43) He trusts in God. Let God rescue him, if he wants to do so now. After all, he said 'I am the Son of God.'" (44) In a similar way, the bandits who were being crucified with him kept insulting him. (45) From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. (46) About three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, eli, lema sabachthani?", which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

**Matthew 27:50-54 ISV** Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice again and died. (51) Suddenly the curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, rocks were split open, (52) tombs were opened, and many saints who had died were brought back to life. (53) After his resurrection, they came out of their tombs and went into the Holy City and appeared to many people. (54) When the centurion and those guarding Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the other things that were taking place, they were terrified and said, "This man certainly was the Son of God!"

**Luke 24:1-7 ISV** But at early dawn on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. (2) They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, (3) but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. (4) While they were puzzling over this, two men in dazzling robes suddenly stood beside them. (5) While the women remained terrified, bowing their faces to the ground, the men asked them, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is living? (6) He is not here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee: (7) 'The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day.'"

**Luke 24:44-47 ISV** Then he told them, "These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled." (45) Then he opened their minds so that they might understand the Scriptures. (46) He told them, "This is how it is written: the Messiah was to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, (47) and then repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

**Romans 5:6-11 ISV** For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, the Messiah died for the ungodly. (7) For it is rare for anyone to die for a righteous person, though somebody might be brave enough to die for a good person. (8) But God demonstrates his love for us by the fact that the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners. (9) Now that we have been justified by his blood, how much more will we be saved from wrath through him! (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life! (11) Not only that, but we also continue to boast about God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom we have now been reconciled.

**1 Peter 2:21-25 ISV** This is, in fact, what you were called to do, because: The Messiah also suffered for you and left an example for you to follow in his steps. (22) "He never sinned, and he never told a lie." (23) When he was insulted, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he did not threaten. It was his habit to commit the matter to the one who judges fairly. (24) "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the tree, so that we might die to those sins and live righteously. "By his wounds you have been healed."

## The Message About the Cross

(25) You were "like sheep that kept going astray," but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

1 John 4:9-10 ISV This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent his unique Son into the world so that we might live through him. (10) This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What is the "message about the cross"? Why do some regard it as "foolishness"? How do the scriptures describe it?
- 2) Who bore the punishment described in Isaiah 53? What does this passage reveal about God's will in his plan to redeem us? Why was this necessary?
- 3) What power did Jesus have over his death? How did he feel prior to his arrest? Why did he go to the cross?
- 4) Why did Jesus cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?
- 5) What do the Old Testament scriptures (the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms) reveal about God's plan to redeem us?
- 6) How does the "message about the cross" reveal the extent of God's love for us?
- 7) What does it mean to "follow in Jesus's steps"?
- 8) How have you responded to the "message about the cross"?

Exercise for Further Insights:

Review the "sin list" you made after the previous study, "The Problem of Sin". View the film *The Passion of the Christ* in order to gain a greater appreciation of the suffering Jesus endured to "pay the price" for those sins. Meditate on the love Jesus demonstrated when he "laid down his life" for you. Determine to respond to Jesus in a manner that is consistent with the scriptures and reflective of your appreciation.

## A New Life in Jesus

**John 14:6 ISV** Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

**1 John 5:11-12 ISV** This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is found in his Son. (12) The person who has the Son has this life. The person who does not have the Son of God does not have this life.

**John 3:1-7 ISV** Now there was a man from the Pharisees, a leader of the Jews, whose name was Nicodemus. (2) He came to Jesus at night and told him, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, because no one can perform these signs that you are doing unless God is with him." (3) Jesus replied to him, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." (4) Nicodemus asked him, "How can a person be born when he is old? He can't go back into his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Don't be astonished that I told you, 'All of you must be born from above.'"

**Acts 2:36-39 ISV** "Therefore, let all the people of Israel understand beyond a doubt that God made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!" (37) When the crowd that had gathered heard this, they were pierced to the heart. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" (38) Peter answered them, "Every one of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. (39) For this promise belongs to you and your children, as well as to all those who are distant, whom the Lord our God may call to himself."

**2 Corinthians 7:8-11 ISV** If I made you sad with my letter, I do not regret it, although I did regret it then. I see that the letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while. (9) Now I am happy, not because you had such sorrow, but because your sorrow led you to repent. For you were sorry in a godly way, and so you were not hurt by us in any way. (10) For having sorrow in a godly way results in repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets. But the sorrow of the world produces death. (11) See what great earnestness godly sorrow has produced in you! How ready you are to clear yourselves, how indignant, how alarmed, how full of longing and enthusiasm, how eager to seek justice! In every way you have demonstrated that you are innocent in this matter.

**Romans 6:1-7 ISV** What should we say, then? Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (2) Of course not! How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it? (3) Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into union with the Messiah Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore, through baptism we were buried with him into his death so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too may live an entirely new life. (5) For if we have become united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. (6) We know that our old natures were crucified with him so that our sin-laden bodies might be rendered powerless and we might no longer be slaves to sin. (7) For the person who has died has been freed from sin.

**Galatians 3:26-27 ISV** For all of you are God's children through faith in the Messiah Jesus. (27) Indeed, all of you who were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah.

## A New Life in Jesus

**Colossians 2:11-12 ISV** In union with him you were also circumcised with a circumcision performed without human hands by stripping off the corrupt nature by the circumcision performed by the Messiah. **(12)** When you were buried with the Messiah in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

**2 Corinthians 5:17 ISV** Therefore, if anyone is in the Messiah, he is a new creation. Old things have disappeared, and—look!—all things have become new!

**1 Peter 2:9-10 ISV** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be his very own and to proclaim the wonderful deeds of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **(10)** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) Can a person be saved apart from Jesus?
- 2) What does it mean to be “born from above”?
- 3) What must a person do to be saved?
- 4) What does it mean to repent?
- 5) What is the difference between “sorrow of the world” and “sorrow in a godly way”?
- 6) What happens when a person is baptized?
- 7) What does it mean to “die as far as sin is concerned” and be “crucified with Jesus”?
- 8) How do the scriptures describe those who are “in the Messiah”?
- 9) What does it mean to be part of a “royal priesthood”?
- 10) Have you been “born from above” as the scriptures direct?



## The Cost of Following Jesus

**Luke 14:25-35 ISV** Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned and told them, (26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, as well as his own life, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't carry his cross and follow me can't be my disciple. (28) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. He will first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough money to finish it, won't he? (29) Otherwise, if he lays a foundation and can't finish the building, everyone who watches will begin to ridicule him (30) and say, 'This person started a building but couldn't finish it.' (31) "Or suppose a king is going to war against another king. He will first sit down and consider whether with 10,000 men he can fight the one coming against him with 20,000 men, won't he? (32) If he can't, he will send a delegation to ask for terms of peace while the other king is still far away. (33) In the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions." (34) "Now, salt is good. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can its flavor be restored? (35) It is suitable neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. People throw it away. Let the person who has ears to hear, listen!"

**Luke 9:23-26 ISV** Then he told all of them, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross every day, and follow me continually, (24) because whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (25) What profit will a person have if he gains the whole world, but destroys himself or is lost? (26) If anyone 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 the holy angels.

**Luke 9:57-62 ISV** While they were walking along the road, a man told him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58) Jesus told him, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest." (59) He told another man, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60) But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61) Still another man said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say goodbye to those at home." (62) Jesus told him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

**John 12:23-26 ISV** Jesus told them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (24) Truly, I tell all of you with certainty, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a lot of grain. (25) The one who loves his life will destroy it, and the one who hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. (26) If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

**John 15:18-21 ISV** "If the world hates you, you should realize that it hated me before you. (19) If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as one of its own. But because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. (20) Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (21) They will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me.

**Matthew 6:14-15 ISV** Because if you forgive people their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive people their offenses, your Father will not forgive your offenses."

**Matthew 6:24 ISV** "No one can serve two masters, because either he will hate one and love the other, or be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches!"

## The Cost of Following Jesus

**Matthew 18:1-3 ISV** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom from heaven?" (2) Calling a little child forward, he had him stand among them. (3) Then he said, "I tell you with certainty, unless you change and become like little children, you will never get into the kingdom from heaven.

**Matthew 20:25-28 ISV** But Jesus called the disciples and said, "You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them and their superiors act like tyrants over them. (26) That's not the way it should be among you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, (27) and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. (28) That's the way it is with the Son of Man. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people."

**Hebrews 3:14 ISV** ...because we are the Messiah's partners only if we hold on to our original confidence to the end.

**2 Timothy 3:12-13 ISV** Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in union with the Messiah Jesus will be persecuted. (13) But evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse as they deceive others and are themselves deceived.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) Have you ever "counted the cost" of following Jesus?
- 2) What does it mean to "give up all of your possessions"?
- 3) What does it mean to "deny yourself, pick up your cross every day and follow Jesus"?
- 4) What does it mean to "lose your life"?
- 5) What does it mean to "put your hand to the plow"?
- 6) What does Jesus expect from his servants?
- 7) What does it mean to be "chosen out of the world"?
- 8) As followers of Jesus, what response should we expect from "the world"? Why?
- 9) Is there anyone you are unwilling to forgive?
- 10) What does it mean to serve only one "master"?
- 11) Why did Jesus say, "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom from heaven"?
- 12) What does it mean to be a "servant"?
- 13) What awaits those who want to "live a godly life in union with the Messiah Jesus"?
- 14) Have you previously surrendered to Jesus on his terms? If not, are you ready to follow him now?

## Responding to God's Grace

**John 15:9-11 ISV** Just as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. So abide in my love. (10) If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (11) I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

**Romans 6:15-16 ISV** What, then, does this mean? Should we go on sinning because we are not under Law but under grace? Of course not! (16) Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

**Romans 12:1-2 ISV** I therefore urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God's will is—what is proper, pleasing, and perfect.

**Ephesians 4:17-24 ISV** Therefore, I tell you and insist on in the Lord not to live any longer like the gentiles live, thinking worthless thoughts. (18) They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. (19) Since they have lost all sense of shame, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and practice every kind of sexual perversion without restraint. (20) However, that is not the way you came to know the Messiah. (21) Surely you have listened to him and have been taught by him, since truth is in Jesus. (22) Regarding your former way of life, you were taught to strip off your old nature, which is being ruined by its deceptive desires, (23) to be renewed in your mental attitude, (24) and to clothe yourselves with the new nature, which was created according to God's image in righteousness and true holiness.

**Titus 2:11-14 ISV** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. (12) It trains us to renounce ungodly living and worldly passions so that we might live sensible, honest, and godly lives in the present age (13) as we wait for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus the Messiah. (14) He gave himself for us to set us free from every wrong and to cleanse us so that we could be his special people who are enthusiastic about doing good deeds.

**1 Peter 1:13-16 ISV** Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep a clear head, and set your hope completely on the grace to be given you when Jesus, the Messiah, is revealed. (14) As obedient children, do not be shaped by the desires that used to influence you when you were ignorant. (15) Instead, be holy in every aspect of your life, just as the one who called you is holy. (16) For it is written, "You must be holy, because I am holy."

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What does it mean to "abide in Jesus's love"?
- 2) What does it mean to "offer yourself to God as an obedient slave"?
- 3) What does it mean to "offer your body as a living sacrifice"?
- 4) What does it mean to "strip off your old nature" and "clothe yourself with the new nature"?
- 5) Why did Jesus "give himself for us"?
- 6) What does it mean to be "holy"?
- 7) Have you responded to God's grace as the scriptures direct? If not, are you ready to commit to a holy life?

## Love: The Best Way of All

**Mark 12:28-31 ISV** Then one of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees arguing with one another. He saw how well Jesus answered them, so he asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of them all?" (29) Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, (30) and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' (31) The second is this: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

**1 John 4:7-12 ISV** Dear friends, let us continually love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God. (8) The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (9) This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent his unique Son into the world so that we might live through him. (10) This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Dear friends, if this is the way God loved us, we must also love one another. (12) No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

**1 Corinthians 12:31 ISV** ... And now I will show you the best way of all. (1) If I speak in the languages of humans and angels but have no love, I have become a reverberating gong or a clashing cymbal. (2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all secrets and every form of knowledge, and if I have absolute faith so as to move mountains but have no love, I am nothing. (3) Even if I give away everything that I have and sacrifice myself, but have no love, I gain nothing. (4) Love is always patient; love is always kind; love is never envious or arrogant with pride. Nor is she conceited, (5) and she is never rude; she never thinks just of herself or ever gets annoyed. She never is resentful; (6) is never glad with sin; she's always glad to side with truth, and pleased that truth will win. (7) She bears up under everything; believes the best in all; there is no limit to her hope, and never will she fall.

**Luke 6:32-36 ISV** "If you love those who love you, what thanks do you deserve? Why, even sinners love those who love them. (33) If you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks do you deserve? Even sinners do that. (34) If you lend to those from whom you expect to get something back, what thanks do you deserve? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back what they lend. (35) Rather, love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind even to ungrateful and evil people. (36) Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

**John 13:34-35 ISV** I am giving you a new commandment to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (35) This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

**Romans 13:8-10 ISV** Do not owe anyone anything—except to love one another. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law. (9) For the commandments, "You must not commit adultery; you must not murder; you must not steal; you must not covet," and every other commandment are summed up in this statement: "You must love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love never does anything that is harmful to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the Law.

**Galatians 5:13-14 ISV** For you, brothers, were called to freedom. Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity to gratify your flesh, but through love make it your habit to serve one another. (14) For the whole Law is summarized in a single statement: "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

## Love: The Best Way of All

**Ephesians 5:1-2 ISV** So be imitators of God, as his dear children. (2) Live lovingly, just as the Messiah also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God.

**Colossians 3:12-14 ISV** Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. (13) Be tolerant of one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, you also should forgive. (14) Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which ties everything together in unity.

**1 Peter 4:8 ISV** Above all, continue to love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What does it mean to “love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength”?
- 2) What does it mean to “love your neighbor as yourself”?
- 3) Who is your neighbor?
- 4) How is “knowing God” connected to loving others?
- 5) What attitudes reflect genuine love?
- 6) How are Christians expected to have a “higher standard” regarding love for others?
- 7) Why did Jesus call his command about loving one another a “new commandment”?
- 8) How will others know we are disciples of Jesus?
- 9) What does it mean to “live lovingly” and to “clothe yourself with love”?
- 10) Have you made a decision to love others as Jesus has loved you? If not, are you ready to “love others deeply”?

## The Family of God

**Matthew 12:46-50 ISV** While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. (47) Someone told him, "Look! Your mother and your brothers are standing outside asking to speak to you." (48) He asked the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (49) Then pointing with his hand at his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers, (50) because whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

**Hebrews 2:10-13 ISV** It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering as part of his plan to glorify many children, (11) because both the one who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers (12) when he says, "I will announce your name to my brothers. I will praise you within the congregation." (13) And again, "I will trust him." And again, "I am here with the children God has given me."

**Romans 8:14-17 ISV** For all who are led by God's Spirit are God's children. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery that leads you into fear again. Instead, you have received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (17) Now if we are children, we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah—if, in fact, we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

**Galatians 3:26-29 ISV** For all of you are God's children through faith in the Messiah Jesus. (27) Indeed, all of you who were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah. (28) Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female. (29) And if you belong to the Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants indeed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Galatians 4:4-7 ISV** But when the appropriate time had come, God sent his Son, born by a woman, born under the Law, (5) in order to redeem those who were under the Law, and thus to adopt them as his children. (6) Now because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry out, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if you are a child, then you are also an heir because of what God did.

**1 Peter 2:9-10 ISV** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be his very own and to proclaim the wonderful deeds of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (10) Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**Colossians 1:24 ISV** Now I am rejoicing while suffering for you as I complete in my flesh whatever remains of the Messiah's sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-27 ISV** (12) For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, form a single body, so it is with the Messiah. (13) For by one Spirit all of us—Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—were baptized into one body and were all privileged to drink from one Spirit. (14) For the body does not consist of only one part, but of many. (15) If the foot says, "Since I'm not a hand, I'm not part of the body," that does not make it any less a part of the body, does it? (16) And if the ear says, "Since I'm not an eye, I'm not part of the body," that does not make it any less a part of the body, does it? (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (18) But now God has arranged

## The Family of God

the parts, every one of them, in the body according to his plan. (19) Now if all of it were one part, there wouldn't be a body, would there? (20) So there are many parts, but one body. (21) The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you," or the head to the feet, "I don't need you." (22) On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are in fact indispensable, (23) and the parts of the body that we think are less honorable are treated with special honor, and we make our less attractive parts more attractive. (24) However, our attractive parts don't need this. But God has put the body together and has given special honor to the parts that lack it, (25) so that there might be no disharmony in the body, but that its parts should have the same concern for each other. (26) If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is praised, every part rejoices with it. (27) Now you are the Messiah's body and individual parts of it.

**Romans 12:4-5 ISV** For we have many parts in one body, but these parts do not all have the same function. (5) In the same way, even though we are many people, we are one body in the Messiah and individual parts connected to each other.

**Ephesians 4:11-16 ISV** And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers, (12) to equip the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to build up the body of the Messiah (13) until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah. (14) Then we will no longer be little children, tossed like waves and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, or by clever strategies that would lead us astray. (15) Instead, by speaking the truth in love, we will grow up completely and become one with the head, that is, one with the Messiah, (16) in whom the whole body is united and held together by every ligament with which it is supplied. As each individual part does its job, the body builds itself up in love.

**Galatians 6:9-10 ISV** Let's not get tired of doing what is good, for at the right time we will reap a harvest—if we do not give up. (10) So then, whenever we have the opportunity, let's practice doing good to everyone, especially to the family of faith.

**Philippians 2:1-4 ISV** Therefore, if there is any encouragement in the Messiah, if there is any comfort of love, if there is any fellowship in the Spirit, if there is any compassion and sympathy, (2) then fill me with joy by having the same attitude, sharing the same love, being united in spirit, and keeping one purpose in mind. (3) Do not act out of selfish ambition or conceit, but with humility think of others as being better than yourselves. (4) Do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.

**Hebrews 3:12-13 ISV** See to it, my brothers, that no evil, unbelieving heart is found in any of you, as shown by your turning away from the living God. (13) Instead, continue to encourage one another every day, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,

**Hebrews 10:24-25 ISV** And let us continue to consider how to motivate one another to love and good deeds, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another even more as you see the day of the Lord coming nearer.

## The Family of God

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) Who does Jesus consider to be his “family”?
- 2) What does it mean to be “led by God’s Spirit”?
- 3) What must we do if we hope to be “co-heirs with the Messiah”?
- 4) How do we “clothe ourselves with the Messiah”?
- 5) What is the “Messiah’s body”?
- 6) What does it mean that there is “one body”?
- 7) What does it mean to be, “individual parts connected to each other”?
- 8) What role do leaders serve in the “body of the Messiah”? Why?
- 9) What does it mean for “each individual part to do its job”?
- 10) What attitude should Christians have toward others?
- 11) Why is it important to “encourage one another every day”?
- 12) What does it mean to “motivate one another on to love and good deeds”?
- 13) Why is Christian assembly so important?
- 14) Have you been committed to the body of the Messiah? If not, are you ready to help it “grow up and build itself up in love”?



## “Works Salvation” vs. “Cheap Grace”

**Matthew 23:2-4 ISV** "The scribes and the Pharisees administer the authority of Moses, (3) So do whatever they tell you and follow it, but stop doing what they do, because they don't do what they say. (4) They tie up burdens that are heavy and unbearable and lay them on people's shoulders, but they refuse to lift a finger to remove them.

**Acts 15:5-11 ISV** But some believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The gentiles must be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses." (6) So the apostles and the elders met to look into this claim. (7) After a lengthy debate, Peter stood up and told them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me to be the one among you through whom the gentiles would hear the message of the gospel and believe. (8) God, who knows everyone's heart, showed them he approved by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. (9) He made no distinction between them and us, because of their faith-cleansed hearts. (10) So why do you test God by putting on the disciples' neck a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we could carry? (11) We certainly believe that it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, that we are saved, just as they are."

**Colossians 2:20-23 ISV** If you have died with the Messiah to the basic principles of the world, why are you submitting to its decrees as though you still lived in the world? (21) "Don't handle this! Don't taste or touch that!" (22) All of these things will be destroyed as they are used, because they are based on human commands and teachings. (23) These things have the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, humility, and harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value against self-indulgence.

**Galatians 5:17-18 ISV** For what the flesh wants is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, and so you do not do what you want to do. (18) But if you are being led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

**2 Corinthians 3:5-6 ISV** By ourselves we are not qualified to claim that anything comes from us. Rather, our credentials come from God, (6) who has also qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, which is not written but spiritual, because the written text brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

Prior to the ministry of Jesus, the Pharisees attempted to promote righteousness through adherence to numerous “rules”. In time, their “rules” became more important to them than the actual commands of God (Matthew 15). Jesus exposed their hypocrisy and the inability of their burdensome rules to promote genuine righteousness. Later, after the church was established, the Jewish Christians failed to recognize that the New Covenant had replaced the Old Covenant, as described in Hebrews 8. Consequently, they attempted to impose elements of the Old Covenant Law (circumcision, etc.) on the gentile Christians. Peter had to correct them for their flawed theology. Likewise, Paul had to correct the Christians at Colossae because they believed it was necessary to supplement their faith with compliance to “Old Covenant regulations”. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul distinguished between “the written text” (a reference to the Old Covenant Law) and the freedom associated with being “led by the Spirit” under the New Covenant. These issues were major concerns during the apostolic age. While the scriptures provided direction to combat such “legalism”, many of the same erroneous principles developed in the church after Constantine “legalized” Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. In time, countless “rules and regulations” were developed for the purpose of defining Christian living. Unfortunately, many began to repeat the errors of the Pharisees of Matthew 15 and gave greater attention to the church’s “rules” than the actual commands of God as revealed in the scriptures. The problem was compounded over a millennium until giving inspiration to the Reformation of the 16th Century. By that time, the church had strayed so far from the scriptures that it actually allowed the “selling of indulgences” whereby

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clergymen collected money in return for absolving the purchaser of his sins. The Protestant movement stood in protest to the “works salvation” mentality that characterized the church. An emphasis on “faith alone” was made based on the following scriptures:

**Romans 3:28 ISV** For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the actions prescribed by the Law.

**Romans 4:1-5 ISV** What, then, are we to say about Abraham, our human ancestor? (2) For if Abraham was justified by actions, he would have had something to boast about—though not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (4) Now to someone who works, wages are not considered a gift but an obligation. (5) However, to someone who does not work, but simply believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

**Galatians 2:15-16 ISV** We ourselves are Jews by birth, and not gentile sinners, (16) yet we know that a person is not justified by doing what the Law requires, but rather by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. We, too, have believed in the Messiah Jesus so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Messiah and not by doing what the Law requires, for no human being will be justified by doing what the Law requires.

**Galatians 3:2-5 ISV** I want to learn only one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the actions of the Law or by believing what you heard? (3) Are you so foolish? Having started out with the Spirit, are you now ending up with the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so much for nothing? (If it really was for nothing!) (5) Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you because you do the actions of the Law or because you believe what you heard?

**Galatians 3:10-11 ISV** Certainly all who depend on the actions of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, "A curse on everyone who does not obey everything that is written in the Book of the Law!" (11) Now it is obvious that no one is justified in the sight of God by the Law, because "The righteous will live by faith."

**Ephesians 2:8-9 ISV** For by such grace you have been saved through faith. This does not come from you; it is the gift of God (9) and not the result of actions, to put a stop to all boasting.

**Galatians 5:4-6 ISV** Those of you who are trying to be justified by the Law have been cut off from the Messiah. You have fallen away from grace. (5) Through the Spirit by faith we confidently await the fulfillment of our righteous hope, (6) for in union with the Messiah Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters. What matters is faith expressed through love.

**Romans 11:5-6 ISV** So it is at the present time: there is a remnant, chosen by grace. (6) But if this is by grace, then it is no longer on the basis of actions. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.

It is evident from these scriptures that salvation is attributable to God’s grace and mercy, not human merit. Salvation cannot be “earned” through “good works”. Rather, it is the gift of God that is credited to those with biblical faith. These scriptures stand in clear contrast to the ritualistic, “works-oriented” religion that developed after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Unfortunately, many who “reacted” to the unbiblical theology of ritualistic religion developed an equally undesirable response, namely, “cheap grace”. In an effort to avoid “robbing God of his glory” by giving any credit to man, the “faith alone” movement

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inadvertently created a disincentive for righteous living. For example, Calvinistic theology considers mankind as “totally depraved”, incapable of even believing without God’s assistance. According to this perspective, it is God’s “election” that determines who is “saved” or “lost”. “Predestination” is emphasized over human “free will”. Since salvation is viewed as a matter of God’s choice, and since God doesn’t change his mind, it is reasoned that salvation cannot be lost. This doctrine is known as “the perseverance of the saints” or “once saved, always saved”. While these views developed in an attempt to “give all of the credit to God”, they ultimately created many of the same erroneous views that were addressed in the apostolic age. Some believers became less motivated because it was reasoned that “works” are not critical if everything is dependent upon God’s election. Grace often deteriorated into “cheap grace” as people de-emphasized “works” to the point of spiritual irresponsibility. The following scriptures addressed such attitudes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

**Romans 6:1-2 ISV** What should we say, then? Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (2) Of course not! How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it?

**Galatians 5:13-14 ISV** For you, brothers, were called to freedom. Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity to gratify your flesh, but through love make it your habit to serve one another. (14) For the whole Law is summarized in a single statement: "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

**Jude 1:4 ISV** For some people have slipped in among you unnoticed. They were written about long ago as being deserving of this condemnation because they are ungodly. They turn the grace of our God into uncontrollable lust and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus the Messiah.

While it is true that no one “earns” their salvation through “works”, it is also true that grace was never intended to be a “license for sin” or a basis for complacency with regard to “works”.

**James 2:14-24 ISV** What good does it do, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but does not prove it with actions? This kind of faith cannot save him, can it? (15) Suppose a brother or sister does not have any clothes or daily food (16) and one of you tells them, "Go in peace! Stay warm and eat heartily." If you do not provide for their bodily needs, what good does it do? (17) In the same way, faith by itself, if it does not prove itself with actions, is dead. (18) But someone may say, "You have faith, and I have actions." Show me your faith without any actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions. (19) You believe that there is one God. That's fine! Even the demons believe that and tremble with fear. (20) Do you want proof, you foolish person, that faith without actions is worthless? (21) Our ancestor Abraham was justified by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar, wasn't he? (22) You see that his faith worked together with what he did, and by his actions his faith was made complete. (23) And so the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And so he was called God's friend. (24) You observe that a person is justified through actions and not through faith alone.

**Matthew 7:13-14 ISV** "Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the road is spacious that leads to destruction, and many people are entering by it. (14) How narrow is the gate and how constricted is the road that leads to life, and there aren't many people who find it!"

**Matthew 7:15-20 ISV** "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are savage wolves. (16) You will know them by their fruit. Grapes aren't gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles, are they? (17) In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a rotten tree produces bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a rotten tree cannot produce good

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fruit. (19) Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire. (20) So by their fruit you will know them."

Matthew 7:21-23 ISV "Not everyone who keeps saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom from heaven, but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven. (22) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, drove out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name, didn't we?' (23) Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice evil!'"

Matthew 7:24-27 ISV "Therefore, everyone who listens to these messages of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. (25) The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not collapse because its foundation was on the rock. (26) "Everyone who keeps on hearing these messages of mine and never puts them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. (27) The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and battered that house, and it collapsed, and its collapse was total."

Luke 13:23-27 ISV Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He told them, (24) "Keep on struggling to enter through the narrow door, because I tell you that many people will try to enter, but won't be able to do so. (25) After the homeowner gets up and closes the door, you can stand outside, knock on the door, and say again and again, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will answer you, 'I don't know where you come from.' (26) Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' (27) But he will tell you, 'I don't know where you come from. Get away from me, all you who practice evil!'"

Ephesians 4:11-13 ISV And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers, (12) to equip the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to build up the body of the Messiah (13) until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah.

1 Corinthians 15:58 ISV (58) Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, unmovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that the work that you do for the Lord isn't wasted.

Revelation 3:14-16 ISV "To the messenger of the church in Laodicea, write: 'The Amen, the witness who is faithful and true, the originator of God's creation, says this: (15) 'I know your actions, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. (16) Since you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth.'

These scriptures clearly indicate that “faith” that is not accompanied by “actions” is illegitimate. Jesus challenged his listeners to “keep on struggling to enter through the narrow door”. He warned of those who addressed him as “Lord” but failed to “do the will of the Father”. Paul described “the work of the ministry” and exhorted the Christians to be “always excelling in the work of the Lord”. Jesus warned the church of Laodicea with regard to their “actions” and their “lukewarm” commitment. Jesus made it clear that “many” will chose the “spacious road” that leads to destruction while “not many” will chose the “constricted road” that leads to life. Those who neglect these teachings because of their “faith alone” theology will fulfill the prophecy of Matthew 7:21-23.

## **“Works Salvation” vs. “Cheap Grace”**

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) Is it possible to “earn” salvation?
- 2) What attitude should we have regarding God’s grace?
- 3) What does it mean to have genuine faith?
- 4) What does it mean to “build our house on the rock”?
- 5) What recognizable “fruit” accompanies genuine faith?
- 6) What does it mean, “a person is justified through actions and not through faith alone”?
- 7) Have you been “steadfast, unmovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord”? If not, are you ready to be “hot” in your commitment to God?

## The Mission

**Matthew 28:18-20 ISV** Then Jesus came up and told them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. And remember, I am with you each and every day until the end of the age."

**Matthew 4:18-22 ISV** While Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon (also called Peter) and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, because they were fishermen. (19) "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fishers of people!" (20) So at once they left their nets and followed him. (21) Going on from there he saw two other brothers—James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee repairing their nets. When he called them, (22) they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him.

**Matthew 5:13-16 ISV** "You are the salt of the world. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty again? It's good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled on by people. (14) "You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. (15) People don't light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before people in such a way that they will see your good actions and glorify your Father in heaven."

**Matthew 9:35-38 ISV** Then Jesus began traveling throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every illness. (36) When he saw the crowds, he was deeply moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (37) Then he told his disciples, "The harvest is vast, but the workers are few. (38) So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

**Matthew 12:30 ISV** "The person who isn't with me is against me, and the person who isn't gathering with me is scattering."

**Luke 19:10 ISV** and the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

**Luke 6:40 ISV** A disciple is not better than his teacher. But everyone who is fully-trained will be like his teacher."

**John 12:26 ISV** If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

**John 21:15-19 ISV** When they had finished breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter told him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs." (16) Then he asked him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter told him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus told him, "Take care of my sheep." (17) He asked him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was deeply hurt that he had asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" So he told him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!" Jesus told him, "Feed my sheep. (18) "Truly, I tell you with certainty, when you were young, you would fasten your belt and go wherever you liked. But when you get old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten your belt and take you where you don't want to go." (19) Now he said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus told him, "Keep following me."

## The Mission

**1 Corinthians 9:16-23 ISV** For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, for this obligation has been entrusted to me. How terrible it would be for me if I didn't preach the gospel! (17) For if I preach voluntarily, I get a reward, but if I am unwilling to do it, I am still entrusted with that obligation. (18) What, then, is my reward? It is to be able to preach the gospel free of charge, and so I never resort to demanding my rights when I'm preaching the gospel. (19) Although I am free from everyone's expectations, I have made myself a servant to all of them to win more people. (20) To the Jews I became like a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the Law I became like a man under the Law, in order to win those under the Law (although I myself am not under the Law). (21) To those who do not have the Law, I became like a man who does not have the Law in order to win those who do not have the Law. However, I am not free from God's Law, but I'm subject to the Messiah's law. (22) To the weak I became weak in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some of them. (23) I do all this for the sake of the gospel in order to have a share in its blessings.

**2 Corinthians 5:14-20 ISV** The love of the Messiah controls us, for we are convinced of this: that one person died for all people; therefore, all people have died. (15) He died for all people, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for the one who died and rose for them. (16) So then, from now on we do not think of anyone from a human point of view. Even if we did think of the Messiah from a human point of view, we don't think of him that way anymore. (17) Therefore, if anyone is in the Messiah, he is a new creation. Old things have disappeared, and—look!—all things have become new! (18) All of this comes from God, who has reconciled us to himself through the Messiah and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) for through the Messiah, God was reconciling the world to himself by not counting their sins against them. He has committed his message of reconciliation to us. (20) Therefore, we are the Messiah's representatives, as though God were pleading through us. We plead on the Messiah's behalf: "Be reconciled to God!"

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What is the "Great Commission"?
- 2) What does it mean to "fish for people"?
- 3) What does it mean to be the "salt of the world" and the "light of the world"?
- 4) What does it mean to "gather" with Jesus?
- 5) Why did Jesus say he came to earth?
- 6) What did Jesus say about his "disciples"?
- 7) What does Jesus expect from those who desire to serve him?
- 8) What did Jesus mean when he told Peter, "feed my sheep"?
- 9) How did Paul "adapt" in order to "save some"?
- 10) What does it mean to "no longer live for ourselves"?
- 11) What does it mean to "not think of anyone from a human point of view"?
- 12) Have you been one of "the Messiah's representatives"? If not, are you ready to begin helping others to be "reconciled to God"?

## Biblical Conversion vs. Religious Tradition

### Biblical Conversion

The following scriptures reflect the “normative” pattern of Christian conversion, as recorded in the New Testament.

**Acts 2:36-41 ISV** "Therefore, let all the people of Israel understand beyond a doubt that God made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!" (37) When the crowd that had gathered heard this, they were pierced to the heart. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" (38) Peter answered them, "Every one of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. (39) For this promise belongs to you and your children, as well as to all those who are distant, whom the Lord our God may call to himself." (40) Using many different expressions, Peter continued to testify and to plead with them, saying, "Be saved from this corrupt generation!" (41) So those who welcomed his message were baptized. That day about 3,000 people were added to their number.

**Acts 8:12 ISV** But when Philip proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and about the name of Jesus the Messiah, men and women believed and were baptized.

**Acts 8:26-39 ISV** Now an angel of the Lord told Philip, "Get up and go south on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a deserted road." (27) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, who was a member of the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasures and had come up to Jerusalem to worship. (28) Now he was returning home, seated in his chariot, and reading from the prophet Isaiah. (29) The Spirit told Philip, "Approach that chariot and stay near it." (30) So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah out loud. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" (31) The man replied, "How can I unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him. (32) This was the passage of Scripture he was reading: "Like a sheep he was led away to be slaughtered, and like a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. (33) In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his descendants? For his life is taken away from the earth." (34) The eunuch asked Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet talking about? Himself? Or someone else?" (35) Then Philip began to speak, and, starting from this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus. (36) As they were going along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. What keeps me from being baptized?" (38) So he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. (39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing and did not see Philip again.

**Acts 9:1-19 ISV** Meanwhile, still spewing death threats against the Lord's disciples, Saul went to the high priest. (2) He asked him for letters to take with him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women belonging to the Way, he might bring them in chains to Jerusalem. (3) As Saul traveled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. (4) He dropped to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (5) He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (6) Now get up, go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (7) Meanwhile, the men who were traveling with Saul were standing speechless, for they heard the voice but didn't see anyone. (8) When Saul got up off the ground, he couldn't see anything, even though his eyes were open. So his companions took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. (9) For three days he couldn't see, and he didn't eat or drink anything. (10) Now in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord told him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Here I am, Lord." (11) The Lord told him, "Get up, go to



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the street called Straight, and in the home of Judas look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. At this very moment he is praying. (12) He has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so he would see again." (13) But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard many people tell how much evil this man has done to your saints in Jerusalem. (14) He is here with authority from the high priests to put in chains all who call on your name." (15) But the Lord told him, "Go, since he is my chosen instrument to carry my name to the gentiles, to their kings, and to the descendants of Israel. (16) For I am going to show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." (17) So Ananias left and went to that house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were traveling, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (18) All at once something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, (19) and after eating some food, he felt strong again. For several days he stayed with the disciples in Damascus.

**Acts 22:12-16 ISV** "A certain Ananias, who was a devout man with respect to the Law and who was highly regarded by all the Jews living there, (13) came to me. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' At that moment I could see him. (14) "Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear his own voice, (15) because you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. (16) What are you waiting for now? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name.'

**Acts 16:14-15 ISV** A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple goods, was listening to us. She was a worshiper of God, and the Lord opened her heart to listen carefully to what was being said by Paul. (15) When she and her family were baptized, she urged us, "If you are convinced that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she continued to insist that we do so.

**Acts 16:25-33 ISV** Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. (26) Suddenly, there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken. All the doors immediately flew open, and everyone's chains were unfastened. (27) When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. (28) But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Don't hurt yourself, because we are all here!" (29) The jailer asked for torches and rushed inside. Trembling as he knelt in front of Paul and Silas, (30) he took them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31) They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved." (32) Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and everyone in his home. (33) At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds. Then he and his entire family were baptized immediately.

**Acts 18:8 ISV** Now Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, along with his whole family. Many Corinthians who heard Paul also believed and were baptized.

Beginning with the very first gospel sermon delivered by Peter on the day of Pentecost following Jesus's resurrection, people were instructed to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Those who obeyed this instruction received the forgiveness of their sins as well as the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Without exception, the conversion accounts in the New Testament record that those who responded to the gospel message were baptized. It is evident that baptism was an urgent matter, as reflected by the Ethiopian eunuch who stopped in the desert to be baptized immediately. Likewise, the Philippian jailer was baptized in the middle of the night. Each of these examples reflects the connection

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that was understood between baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Saul (who became Paul) did not have his “sins washed away” until he was baptized (even though he had a direct encounter with Jesus, experienced a miracle, and fasted and prayed for three days).

The following scriptures reflect exceptions to the “normative” pattern of Christian conversion, as recorded in the New Testament.

**Acts 8:14-17 ISV** Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaritans had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. (15) They went down and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. (16) Before this he had not come on any of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 10:37-48 ISV** You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. (38) God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, he went around doing good and healing everyone who was oppressed by the devil. (39) We are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the land of the Jews, including Jerusalem. "They hung him on a tree and killed him, (40) but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear— (41) not to all the people, but to us who were chosen by God to be witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (42) He also ordered us to preach to the people and to testify solemnly that this is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. (43) All the prophets testify to this: everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (44) While Peter was still making this statement, the Holy Spirit fell on all the people who were listening to his message. (45) Then the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles, too. (46) For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, (47) "No one can stop us from using water to baptize these people who have received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we did, can they?" (48) So Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Then they asked him to stay there for several days.

The scriptures state that the Samaritan Christians of Acts 8 did not receive the Holy Spirit at baptism. Rather, the Spirit was given as the apostles “laid their hands on them”. The gift of the Holy Spirit was “poured out” on the gentile Christians of Acts 10 even before they were baptized. Each of these examples is considered to be “atypical” as compared to the “normative” conversion experience that is reflected in the New Testament record. There is some speculation that each of these passages are actually referring to the “miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit” rather than the “indwelling Holy Spirit”. In any event, it appears that these “atypical” examples were purposeful as a means of communicating God’s acceptance of both Samaritans and gentiles to the Jewish Christians. Such an explanation is consistent with the following verses:

**Matthew 10:5-6 ISV** These were the Twelve whom Jesus sent out after he had given them these instructions: "Don't turn on to the road that leads to the gentiles, and don't enter Samaritan towns. (6) Instead, go to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel.

**Matthew 15:21-24 ISV** Then Jesus left that place and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. (22) Suddenly a Canaanite woman from that territory came near and began to shout, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed!" (23) But he didn't answer her at all. Then his disciples came up and kept urging him, "Send her away, because she keeps on screaming as she follows us." (24) But he replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel."

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**John 4:7-9 ISV** A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus told her, "Please give me a drink," (8) since his disciples had gone off into town to buy food. (9) The Samaritan woman asked him, "How can you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" Because Jews do not have anything to do with Samaritans.

**John 4:19-24 ISV** The woman told him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet! (20) Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain. But you Jews say that the place where people should worship is in Jerusalem." (21) Jesus told her, "Believe me, dear lady, the hour is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (22) You don't know what you're worshiping. We Jews know what we're worshiping, because salvation comes from the Jews. (23) Yet the time is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Indeed, the Father is looking for people like that to worship him. (24) God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

**Romans 1:16 ISV** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew first and of the Greek as well.

**Ephesians 2:11-13 ISV** So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth were called "the uncircumcised" by those who called themselves "the circumcised." They underwent physical circumcision done by human hands. (12) At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. You had no hope and were in the world without God. (13) But now, in union with the Messiah Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.

Jesus's message was originally for the Jews only – not the Samaritans or the gentiles. At one time, the gentiles were "excluded from citizenship in Israel" and "without God". The gospel was for the Jews first before it was available to everyone else. Yet it was always God's plan that salvation would be available to both Jews and gentiles. Even Peter needed a "vision" from God to help him understand that the gospel was for the gentiles also (Acts 10:9-16 & 10:34-35). The "atypical" conversion experiences of the Samaritan and gentile Christians that are recorded in Acts 8 and Acts 10 provided confirmation to the observing Jewish Christians that God had extended salvation to them also. Once this had been made clear, no further "exceptions" were necessary. The remaining conversion accounts in the New Testament reflect the "normative" pattern. The following passage reflects the only example of "re-baptism" in the New Testament.

**Acts 19:1-5 ISV** It was while Apollos was in Corinth that Paul passed through the inland districts and came to Ephesus. He found a few disciples there (2) and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered him, "No, we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." (3) He then asked, "Then into what were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." (4) Then Paul said, "John baptized when they repented, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." (5) On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Apollos, who evidently received "John's baptism" prior to the establishment of the New Covenant following Jesus's resurrection, had applied an "obsolete baptism" to those he taught in Ephesus. Although "John's baptism" was effective for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3) at the time Apollos received it, it was replaced by "Christian baptism" after Jesus's resurrection. Accordingly, it was no longer appropriate for Apollos to apply "John's baptism" once the New Covenant became effective. It is implied in Acts 18:26 that Priscilla and Acquila corrected Apollos on issues such as this. It also appears

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that Paul went to Ephesus looking for disciples who had received an obsolete baptism from Apollos. Upon finding them, Paul explained how Christian baptism superseded “John’s baptism”, consistent with the following scripture:

**Matthew 3:11 ISV** I am baptizing you with water as a token of repentance, but the one who is coming after me is stronger than I am, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. It is he who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Upon realizing the deficiencies in their conversion experiences, the Ephesian disciples were immediately “re-baptized” – this time in the name of Jesus. The following passage records the baptism of Jesus.

**Matthew 3:13-17 ISV** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. (14) But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?" (15) But Jesus answered him, "Let it be this way for now, because this is the proper way for us to fulfill all righteousness." At this, he permitted him to be baptized. (16) When Jesus had been baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Suddenly the heavens opened up for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. (17) Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with him!"

Even though Jesus was sinless and did not need to have any sins forgiven, he still submitted to baptism in order to do what was “proper to fulfill all righteousness”. Jesus set an example in attitude that all of his followers should imitate.

### Religious Tradition - Infant Baptism

Scholars disagree on the date when infant baptism was first practiced. Some believe that 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christians did not practice it, noting the lack of any explicit evidence of paedobaptism. Others, noting the lack of any explicit evidence of exclusion of paedobaptism, believe that they did, understanding biblical references to individuals "and [her] household" being baptized (Acts 16:15, Acts 16:31-33, 1 Corinthians 1:16) as well as "the promise to you and your children" (Acts 2:39) as including small children and infants. While the earliest extra-biblical directions for baptism, which occurs in the Didache (c. 100), speaks to the baptism of adults, rather than young children, since it requires that the person to be baptized should fast, writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century indicate that some Christians baptized infants too.

(See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infant\\_baptism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infant_baptism) and <http://bible.org/question/what-are-historical-origins-infant-baptism>)

Notably, the conclusion that infant baptism was practiced by 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christians is based on inference rather than any definitive reference from scripture or any 1<sup>st</sup>-century extra-biblical document. The earliest references to the practice of infant baptism postdate the apostolic age by over a century.

The Roman Catholic Church practices infant baptism as means of securing forgiveness of “original sin” (See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Original\\_sin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Original_sin)). The following scripture demonstrates the inconsistency between this doctrine and the biblical basis for individual guilt.

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**Ezekiel 18:20 ISV** The soul who sins dies. The son won't bear the punishment of his father's sin and the father won't bear the punishment of his son's sin. The righteous deeds of that righteous person will be attributed to him, while the wicked deeds of the wicked person will be charged against him.

The doctrine of “original sin” is inconsistent with the message of Ezekiel 18 (see the remainder of Ezekiel 18 for additional details). Accordingly, this premise for infant baptism (so that infants may be forgiven of “original sin”) is biblically unsupported.

Several Protestant denominations also practice infant baptism by sprinkling, but for other reasons than for the procurement of forgiveness of original sin. Some view it as a New Testament practice that supersedes the Old Testament practice of circumcision as a means of dedication and participation in God’s Covenant (See the previous link for details of the differing Protestant rationales for infant baptism).

While this motivation for the practice of infant baptism may be sincere and noble, the explicit evidence from scripture and the earliest extra biblical sources do not support the conclusion that it was practiced in the apostolic age. This is evident from the New Testament manuscripts that address the subject. The Greek word for “baptize” is defined as follows: (See link below) Baptize (baptizo in Greek) - Strong's Number: 907

1. to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk)
2. to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe
3. to overwhelm

The biblical practice of “immersion” was subsequently supplemented with other modes such as “pouring” and “sprinkling”, which are not recorded in the scriptures.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/baptizo.html>

During the first three centuries, adult baptism was the rule. There is little documentation of infant baptism prior to Tertullian’s “On Baptism”, which was written about A. D. 200. Tertullian is mentioned in Philip Schaff’s “History of the Christian Church”, which is available at the following website:

[http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2\\_ch05.htm](http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2_ch05.htm)

Both the mode of infant baptism (sprinkling) and the rationale for it (forgiveness of original sin, dedication/entry into the New Covenant, etc.) represent innovations that developed following the apostolic age. Such practices are not documented in the New Testament. Claims to the contrary are dependent on eisegesis (the process of misinterpreting a text in such a way that it introduces one's own ideas or reading into the text – see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisegesis>).

In contrast, the biblical word for “baptize” (baptizo in the Greek) means to immerse. This definition is consistent with being “buried with the Messiah” (Romans 6:4 & Colossians 2:12). Infant baptism did not become the predominant baptismal mode until the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Infant baptism is inconsistent with the prerequisites to conversion of faith (Colossians 2:12) and repentance (Acts 2:38).

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### Religious Tradition - Believer's Baptism

"Believer's baptism" refers to baptism that is practiced as a "ceremony", subsequent to the point of faith. According to this view, baptism is not considered to be part of the salvation process. Rather, salvation (forgiveness of sins and the receipt of the indwelling Holy Spirit) is believed to occur at the moment of faith and baptism is viewed as "an outward sign of an inward grace". Accordingly, baptism is practiced as an act of obedience and as a method of displaying to others the regeneration that is believed to have already occurred in a person's life as a result of faith. As a result of this view, baptism is not viewed as urgent. Some of the scriptures that are often cited to support the view that salvation occurs prior to baptism are provided as follows:

**Revelation 3:20 ISV** Look! I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone listens to my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will eat with me.

**Romans 10:8-13 ISV** But what does it say? "The message is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart." This is the message about faith that we are proclaiming: (9) If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (10) For one believes with his heart and is justified, and declares with his mouth and is saved. (11) The Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will never be ashamed." (12) There is no difference between Jew and Greek, because they all have the same Lord, who gives richly to all who call on him. (13) "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

**Romans 4:9-12 ISV** Now does this blessedness come to the circumcised alone, or also to the uncircumcised? For we say, "Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness." (10) Under what circumstances was it credited? Was he circumcised or uncircumcised? He had not yet been circumcised, but was uncircumcised. (11) Afterward he received the mark of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Therefore, he is the ancestor of all who believe while uncircumcised, in order that righteousness may be credited to them. (12) He is also the ancestor of the circumcised—those who are not only circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

**Galatians 3:2 ISV** I want to learn only one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the actions of the Law or by believing what you heard?

**Ephesians 1:13-14 ISV** You, too, have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed in the Messiah, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems his own possession for his praise and glory.

**1 John 5:1 ISV** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born from God, and everyone who loves the parent also loves the child.

**Luke 23:39-43 ISV** Now one of the criminals hanging there kept insulting him, "You are the Messiah, aren't you? Save yourself and us!" (40) But the other criminal rebuked him, "Aren't you afraid of God, since you are suffering the same penalty? (41) We have been condemned justly, because we are getting what we deserve for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong." (42) Then he went on to plead, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" (43) Jesus told him, "I tell you with certainty, today you will be with me in Paradise."

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The passage in Revelation 3 represents a message from Jesus to “lukewarm” Christians (people who had already been saved) in Laodicea. It is not a passage that contains instructions for how non-Christians become Christians. Romans 10 must be interpreted in view of Romans 6, which describes how Christians were “united with the Messiah” when “through baptism we were buried with him into his death” (consistent with the message of John 3:5 about being “born from above”). It appears that Paul’s intention in Romans 10 was to emphasize the need for the Jews (God’s chosen people under the Old Covenant and the original audience of the Messiah) to embrace Jesus as Lord (regardless of any persecution). This understanding appears to be consistent with Paul’s overall theme in Romans 6 – 10. For those who view baptism as the “circumcision of the New Covenant” (based on scriptures such as Colossians 2:11-12), it is easy to understand the basis for the conclusion that salvation occurs prior to baptism. However, Colossians 2:11-12 indicates that being “raised with Jesus” occurs subsequent to being “buried with the Messiah in baptism”. Again, Romans 4 must be interpreted in a manner that is consistent with the remainder of scripture. Scriptures such as Galatians 3, Ephesians 1, and 1 John 5 appear to address the issues of “salvation by faith” vs. “salvation by actions” rather than “salvation prior to baptism” vs. “salvation at baptism”. Also, the emphasis appears to be that the Christians were “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (rather than a concern for when they were “sealed”). It is often argued that baptism is not required for salvation because the “thief on the cross” was saved without baptism. However, this passage must be interpreted in view of the message of the following scriptures:

**Hebrews 8:6-13 ISV** However, Jesus has now obtained a more superior ministry, since the covenant he mediates is founded on better promises. (7) If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one, (8) but God found something wrong with his people when he said, "Look! The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (9) It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors at the time when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not remain loyal to my covenant, I ignored them, declares the Lord. (10) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (11) Never again will everyone teach his neighbor or his brother by saying, 'Know the Lord,' because all of them will know me, from the least important to the most important. (12) For I will be merciful regarding their wrong deeds, and I will never again remember their sins." (13) In speaking of a "new" covenant, he has made the first one obsolete, and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

**Hebrews 9:16-18 ISV** For where there is a will, the death of the one who made it must be established. (17) For a will is in force only when somebody has died, since it never takes effect as long as the one who made it is alive. (18) This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.

Prior to Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection, the “Old Covenant” (based on the Law of Moses) was still applicable. However, once the “New Covenant” became effective (after Jesus’s resurrection), the “Old Covenant” disappeared. It would not have been possible for the “thief on the cross” to have been “united with the Messiah in his death, burial, and resurrection” (per Romans 6:1-7) before Jesus had died. Accordingly, the “thief on the cross” was one of the last people saved under the “Old Covenant”. That covenant no longer exists. In order to enter into the “New Covenant”, the scriptures teach that we need to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of (our) sins” (Acts 2:38). Therefore, the experience of the “thief on the cross” is not relevant to us today regarding the salvation process.

## Biblical Conversion vs. Religious Tradition

The Nicene Creed (AD 325) - see <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm>

*We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

It is clear from this document of 325 A. D. that the early church taught “baptism for the remission of sins”. While it is recognized that extra-biblical literature such as the Nicene Creed is not “scripture”, it is useful in recognizing that the doctrine of “believer’s baptism” is rooted in post-Reformation views rather than documents from the apostolic age. Clearly, the urgency displayed in scripture to be baptized “in the middle of the desert” or “in the middle of the night” is inconsistent with the doctrine of “believer’s baptism”. The extra biblical writings of the early Christians provide compelling evidence that baptism was practiced by immersion during the apostolic age and was understood to be integral to the forgiveness of sins. This view coincides with the “normative” conversion pattern that is evident in the New Testament. Notably, this understanding and practice differs from the dominant mode (sprinkling) of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and following, as well as the dominant rationale (as a post-salvation symbol that serves as a testimony to others) that prevailed among Protestants following the Reformation. These “post apostolic era” views of baptism are still dominant among Catholics and Protestants today.

Some churches have adopted the posture that salvation is contingent upon a “correct” view and practice of baptism. Consequently, those with “divergent baptismal experiences” are not acknowledged as legitimate Christians but are perceived as “religious people” that need to be re-baptized in order to be saved. Such a posture fails to acknowledge the diversity that exists in the scriptures on the topic and also presumes to know God’s perspective as Judge. In view of God’s timelessness (2 Peter 3:8), in contrast to the finite nature of humans, such a speculative stance is beyond the realm of human perception. There are numerous scriptures that address the topic of “judging others” which are often neglected by those who adopt such a position. A more biblical posture would be to encourage self-examination, which is consistent with the theme of 2 Corinthians 13:5. It is reasonable to imitate Jesus’s example with regard to “fulfilling all righteousness”. It is also valid to imitate the humility of the Ephesian disciples of Acts 19 in order to adapt one’s conversion experience to scripture (rather than vice-versa).

### Questions for Consideration

- 1) What must a person do to be saved?
- 2) What are the prerequisites to baptism?
- 3) What was the attitude of the “Ephesian disciples” identified in Acts 19?
- 4) How does your conversion experience compare with the “normative” New Testament pattern?
- 5) Are you willing to imitate Jesus’s example as described in Matthew 3:15 in order to “fulfill all righteousness”?



## Worship in Spirit and Truth

**John 4:21-24 ISV** Jesus told her, "Believe me, dear lady, the hour is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (22) You don't know what you're worshipping. We Jews know what we're worshipping, because salvation comes from the Jews. (23) Yet the time is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Indeed, the Father is looking for people like that to worship him. (24) God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

**Matthew 7:21-23 ISV** "Not everyone who keeps saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom from heaven, but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven. (22) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, drove out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name, didn't we?' (23) Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice evil!'"

**Matthew 15:1-9 ISV** Then some Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to Jesus and asked, (2) "Why do your disciples disregard the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands when they eat." (3) But he answered them, "Why do you also disregard the commandment of God because of your tradition? (4) Because God said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Whoever curses father or mother must certainly be put to death.' (5) But you say 'Whoever tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever support you might have received from me has been given to God,' (6) does not have to honor his father.' Because of your tradition, then, you have disregarded the authority of God's word. (7) You hypocrites! How well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, (8) 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. (9) Their worship of me is empty, because they teach human rules as doctrines.'"

**Galatians 1:6-10 ISV** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of the Messiah and, instead, are following a different gospel, (7) not that another one really exists. To be sure, there are certain people who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel about the Messiah. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that person be condemned! (9) What we have told you in the past I am now telling you again: If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that person be condemned! (10) Am I now trying to win the approval of people or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be the Messiah's servant.

**Ephesians 4:4-6 ISV** There is one body and one Spirit. Likewise, you were called to the one hope of your calling. (5) There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all.

**Philippians 2:12 ISV** And so, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only when I was with you but even more now that I am absent, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

**1 Timothy 4:16 ISV** Pay close attention to your life and your teaching. Persevere in these things, because if you do so, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

**2 Timothy 2:15 ISV** Do your best to present yourself to God as an approved worker who has nothing to be ashamed of, handling the word of truth with precision.

**Acts 17:10-11 ISV** That night the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. (11) These people were more receptive than those in

## Worship in Spirit and Truth

Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive the message, and every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if those things were so.

**James 1:5-8 ISV** Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to everyone generously without a rebuke, and it will be given to him. (6) But he must ask in faith, without any doubts, for the one who has doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (7) Such a person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (8) He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he undertakes.

Questions for Consideration:

- 1) What does it mean to worship in “spirit and truth”?
- 2) Why will many “religious” people discover too late that they are not heaven-bound?
- 3) What does it mean for “worship to be empty”?
- 4) What does it mean to follow a “different gospel”?
- 5) If there is only one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God, why are there so many “versions” of Christianity?
- 6) What does it mean to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”?
- 7) How critical is “your teaching”, according to 1 Timothy 4:16?
- 8) What does it mean to “handle the word of truth with precision”?
- 9) Why were the Berean Jews commended?
- 10) What promise does God make to those who seek the truth?
- 11) Have you responded to God’s grace as the scriptures direct?
- 12) Have you committed to follow Jesus on his terms?
- 13) Is there anything you need to do to correct any deficiency with your spiritual status?