

Why I

Believe



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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

MARCH 3 – I BELIEVE IN GOD

Past hurts and offenses can haunt us and make us angry. Is there an answer? Yes, we can forgive and forget! To be sons of our Father in heaven, who is kind and forgiving, we must also learn to forgive and forget.

MARCH 10 – I BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Did God design this world, or have we come into being by accident? Is there evidence of an intelligent designer or did we evolve from non-living matter? The design in this world leads us to believe in an intelligent and powerful designer, God!

MARCH 17 – I BELIEVE THE BIBLE

Do you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God? This is a most important question; and how you answer will affect your eternal destiny. Belief in God is both rational and intelligent; there are many reasons we can believe.

MARCH 24 – I BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH

Since Jesus came into the world to save us, He has been calling us to come to Him. We come to Jesus for salvation, for eternal life, and for rest for our souls. We can do nothing better in all our lives than to come to Jesus.

MARCH 31 – I BELIEVE IN MORALITY

Many assume they have all they need and can live on their own terms. People who think they can do it on their own often forget what God has done for them and their utter need for God for their life and their salvation.

I Believe in God

Is there a God? Did He create me? Am I accountable to Him? Many people question the existence of God, but there are good reasons to believe. Because the Scriptures come from God, they reveal God's wisdom and His character. If God is true, then His Words are true and they give us confidence. I'm thankful for the confidence I gain through a study of the Word of God because it provides a solid and true foundation in a world of uncertainty and fabrications. I want the truth, and I know the true God has given it to us through His Word!

Someone may ask the question, "Why do you believe in God?" That's an important question and it deserves an answer. First Peter 3:15 says, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." As an evangelist, I'm asking you to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Christ. I'm asking you to believe God created you, and that you're accountable to Him. I'm asking you to believe Jesus died upon a cross for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. I realize what I'm asking of you is far more critical than asking you to buy a certain brand of soap or a certain type of car. I'm asking you to give yourself completely to Jesus.

Many reject God and Christ, offering many reasons why they no longer want to affiliate with any god or any church. If God exists, you're risking your soul by rejecting Him. By rejecting God, you'll lose the opportunity to enjoy His promises in this life and the one to come.

Our reading today is a psalm of David and in his first part of the psalm, he talks about creation, and how the creation talks of the glory of God. **Psalm 19:1-3.**

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.

We should accept only those ideas supported by adequate evidence. The evidence for God comes to us not only from His revealed Word, which we'll talk about later, but also from what we can observe in the universe, in nature, and in ourselves. Hebrews 3:4 says, "For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God."

Our universe reveals order and design with laws and stability. The reason Americans could land on the moon in 1969 was because of the stability and predictability of our universe. Our earth is orderly and designed to be sustainable. God promised Noah, "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). This promise from God has held true, even to this day, even though thousands of years have passed since the time of Noah. We can plan our calendars and seasons by the predictability of our solar system. To suggest that this happens by accident is absurd. Only an all-powerful, all-knowing supernatural Person could make this universe with its order, design, and laws, and keep it in working order.

Someone objects, "If God made this universe, who made God?" There had to be something in the beginning. The chances of nothing becoming something is zero. There had to be a first cause. The scientific second law of Thermodynamics demands a beginning; God is that unmoved mover that started everything. God is self-existent and has always existed. Psalm 90:2 explains, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the

earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” Only an all-powerful, all knowing supernatural Person could make and sustain this universe.

Our universe also reveals what kind of Creator we have. Romans 1:20 says, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” When we examine what God has created, we can clearly see His power and divine nature. David spoke about God’s role in making his human body in Psalm 139:13-14, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” The complexity of the human body with trillions of cells, a brain, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the skeleton, the heart, the lungs, the skin, the hands, and the feet, your nervous system, your hormone system, your digestive system, your circulatory system, and your muscles all declare wisdom and design. You are not cheap junk. God made you in His image.

I have a smart phone. It connects me to the world through the phone and through the internet. I have apps with entire libraries, apps that tell me the news and weather, apps with helpful utilities, apps with movies, and apps with games. It’s a marvelous tool and contains ten times the memory of my first laptop computer. Does anybody in the world think that a smart phone made itself or is the product of an accident? Why, of course not!

Yet, I can say with confidence that just one living cell in your body (which has trillions of cells) is more complicated, more detailed than anything in a smart phone. According to “Genome Facts,” in Nova Online, the amount of information in one DNA molecule would fill 1000 books of encyclopedia size. It would take a person typing 60 words per minute, eight hours a day, around 50 years to type the human genome. If all the DNA in your body’s 100 trillion cells was put end to end, it would reach to the sun (90 million miles away) and back over 600 times. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by an all-knowing, all-powerful God. This DNA code determines what we are as living creatures. It is specific and complex. It couldn’t just happen; God caused you. Created you. God is our intelligent Designer.

Add to this your ability to live. Acts 17:28 says, “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” As the offspring of God, we have a spirit that thinks, a conscience that judges, a heart that loves, and a soul that hopes. How did our thinking mind, our consciousness come about? Did we get it from non-living matter? While there are theories, there simply are no scientific facts describing the origin of life or consciousness.

Is it accidental that we can ask a question or reason or have morals? Even people who do not know God have a sense of right and wrong, because of God. Romans 2:14-15 explains, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.” Who gave you a conscience that continually judges your thoughts and behavior?

No rock or mineral could have given you a conscience. The presence of morals implies more than just a conscience; it also implies a moral governor, someone who is moral and made moral laws. That moral governor is God who hates sin and loves righteousness. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged

sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Because He made you, He has the right to hold you accountable for your attitudes, your words, and your actions. Romans 14:12 says, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” While your body will one day pass away, your soul or spirit will survive. If God is real, and He is, then what He says about heaven and hell are true. Only a God who sees and knows more than we can see and know could speak of judgment and eternity. We can believe what God says about things we cannot see because He speaks so clearly in the Bible about the things that we can clearly see.

Sometimes people object to God's existence, saying, “Faith in God isn't scientific; it's a leap in the dark.” Many think if you believe in science, you can't believe in God. They suggest faith in God is unreasonable. Really? Have you considered that many credible scientists and logicians have professed faith in God? For instance, the book of Romans in the New Testament was used for centuries as a primary source in the study of logic. According to Louw and Nida, in their Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, there are 122 separate vocabulary words in the semantic section dealing with thinking and reasoning. The Lord and His people knew how to think in the first century; and they know how to think today.

Who are some of the scientists and intellectuals who believe in God? Nicholas Copernicus was the Polish astronomer who put forward the first mathematically based system of planets going around the sun. Sir Francis Bacon was a philosopher who is known for establishing the scientific method of inquiry based on experimentation and inductive reasoning. Johannes Kepler was a brilliant mathematician and astronomer. He did early work on light, and established the laws of planetary motion about the sun. Blaise Pascal was a mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and theologian. He published a treatise on the subject of geometry and established the foundation of probability theory. Pascal invented a mechanical calculator, and established the principles of vacuums and the pressure of air. Isaac Newton was an undisputed genius in optics, mechanics, and mathematics. He is most famous for discovering gravity. He wrote in his book, *Principia*, "The most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."

We could also mention Faraday, Boyle, Pasteur, and Mendel. We can even include Albert Einstein as a believer in a Supreme Being. It was the harmony of what exists that led Einstein to study science. He remarked to a young physicist, “I want to know how God created this world; I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are details.” Though Einstein, a Jew who rejected a personal God but was not an atheist complained, “In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human mind, am able to recognize, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what really makes me angry is that they quote me (that is, Einstein) for the support of such views.”

Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, did not deny the existence of God. He said it was illogical to believe the universe created itself. “The impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God...I am aware that if we admit a first cause, the mind

still craves to know whence it came, and how it arose.”

Darwin saw intelligence and design in the incredible complexity of the eye. He admitted in *The Origin of Species*, “To suppose the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.” When I read *The Origin of Species* years ago, I was struck with Darwin's many statements questioning what he was claiming. He spoke often about all the things that he was guessing and did not know for sure. To this day, the theory of evolution remains a theory and has never been proved concretely. No one has ever seen one kind of animal become another kind of animal, and the fossil record doesn't reveal this kind of transition. Even Darwin admits at the end of *The Origin of Species* that there is a Creator responsible for the origin of life.

Science can sometimes tell us what happened, but it cannot always tell us who, why, or how. It can theorize and guess, based on what it knows; but science cannot test and verify the creation or beginning. It cannot tell you the origin of life. It cannot tell you how one-celled animals became multi-cellular, how cold-blooded animals became warm-blooded, or how spineless creatures developed a vertebrae, or how fish could breathe underwater, and how birds developed the ability to fly.

Science cannot tell you how you became a conscious, moral being. Faith in God makes sense in this world. It's far more believable to accept God as my Creator than it is to accept that my conscious, moral life arose accidentally out of non-living matter. People in every culture in every place in every age have believed that there is a higher Being who created them and gave them life. He made you, and one day you will give an account to Him for your life.

If there is no God, you're simply a product of chance and accident. You don't know where you came from; you don't know why you're here; and you don't know if there's any life after death. If there is no God, there's no one who can tell you why you are alive, why you are conscious, and why you and I can communicate with each other. When your conscience says you have sinned, you have no answer to your guilt. If there is no God, you have no one to forgive you. If there is no God, when your loved ones die, you have no confidence of ever seeing them again. When you face a crisis, you have no God to pray to. You have no one to thank for your blessings. If there is no God, you're alone without a purpose, a hope, or a future.

But there is a God! He created you and sustains you with air, water, food, and many blessings. He sent His Son, Jesus, to teach the truth and bear the cross for you, so that you could be forgiven and have a good conscience. God loves you and wants to bless you now and in the life to come. He is real and you can believe in Him!

To be right with God, believe and confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Change your heart and life in repentance, truly making Him “Lord.” Be baptized into Christ to be united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. When you're baptized, God washes away your sins in the blood of Jesus, gives you newness of life, makes you His child, and adds you to His church. Why not obey the Lord today?

I Believe in Christ

We number years from the birth of Christ, and some historians regard Him as the most influential person who ever lived. Is Christ God's Son? I love the Word of God because it tells me of God's love and grace. I learn of God's power and His concern for my welfare. I learn of God's provision to forgive my sins through Christ, to make me His child, and to give me a home in heaven. I love God and His promises, and I pray that you do, too!

Some question whether Jesus really lived; they say he is a myth like Superman or Harry Potter. The historians of old, however, never questioned his existence. Historians from ancient times like Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, or Lucian all speak of Jesus Christ. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, and the Emperor Trajan wrote letters to one another discussing what to do with Christians who believed in Jesus Christ. The 27 books of the New Testament, dating from the first century, speak of Him as real. The existence of the church from the Day of Pentecost points to His great influence.

Many have recognized Jesus as the most influential, significant, and important person who ever lived. He is certainly the greatest religious leader of all time, and no one can compare with Him. He lived a sinless life and blessed everyone who knew Him. Even His enemies knew of His ability to work miracles. After He raised Lazarus from the dead, the enemies said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs (miracles). If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:47-48). Yes, Jesus lived and worked miracles!

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul's Letter to the Romans 10:14-17.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

When we speak of Jesus, we're speaking of someone unique. There is no one like Him in all of time. The Old Testament predicts His coming into the world. Even the wise men from the East saw His star. They knew He would be born in Bethlehem, because Micah 5:2 says, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." They knew He would be born of a virgin because Isaiah 7:14 says, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Matthew confirms this prophecy of Jesus' birth, that Jesus was born of a virgin and called Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Jesus criticized the Jews, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). He knew the Scriptures spoke about Him and told His apostles, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

The apostles appealed often to the prophecies of the Old Testament to show Jesus was the promised Messiah. Peter preached at the temple, "But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18). Paul told the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, "And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb" (Acts 13:29). Paul later reasoned with the Jews at Thessalonica, "from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ (the Messiah)'" (Acts 17:2-3).

The prophecies of Jesus proved true. He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem of Judah. The wise men did come to visit Him because they saw His star. Jesus was born according to the prophecy of Daniel during the fourth great kingdom, the Roman Empire. These are not accidents. Daniel 2:44 says, "And in the days of those kings (that is, the kings of that forth empire) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever." Jesus established His kingdom, His church, during the first century; and it stands to this day!

Isaiah prophesied of Him, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Isaiah also prophesied that Jesus would bear the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6 and also verse 8), that He would be silent before His enemies (verse 7), and His grave would be assigned with wicked men and a rich man (verse 9). He was crucified between two criminals and was buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. Psalm 41 and Psalm 55 predict Jesus would be betrayed by a familiar friend, and Judas Iscariot betrayed Him. Zechariah 11:12 says Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and He was (Matthew 26). Psalm 22:18 predicted that they would divide His clothes and cast lots for them, and the Roman soldiers did just that (John, chapter 19).

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, when Peter with the twelve proclaimed that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-10, "I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." The body of Jesus was in the tomb from Friday until Sunday morning, three days in Jewish time. It did not decay, but God raised Him from the dead.

Jesus Himself predicted, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up" (Matthew 20:18-19). David had predicted a thousand years before the time of Christ in the Messianic Psalm 22:16, "a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet." Crucifixion was unknown in the days of David, a thousand years before Christ. The Babylonians started crucifying people in the sixth century B.C. The Greeks

then learned it from the Babylonians, and the Romans learned it from the Greeks.

The Romans would only crucify non-citizens. The Jews would have stoned Jesus if they had the legal right to execute Him. Instead, the Roman soldiers had to put Jesus to death. This fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 2:2 that “the rulers (plural) would take counsel together against the Lord and against the Anointed.” The chief priests and Pontius Pilate agreed to put Jesus to death, just as Psalm 2 prophesied.

We might ask the question, “Could Jesus really work miracles? Did He really rise from the dead?” While some deny miracles are possible, the apostles were eyewitnesses and insisted that He arose! Acts 1:3 says, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” This is why these men were willing to risk persecution, imprisonment, and death to proclaim His resurrection to the world.

After beatings and scourging, after being nailed to a cross, after a spear pierced his side, and after being wrapped head to toe in cloths soaked with myrrh and aloe, Jesus was surely dead in His tomb. He wasn't merely wounded and revived on His own. The tomb was closed with a giant stone, weighing three to four thousand pounds, and sealed with the governor's seal. No one could move this large stone without breaking the governor's seal and breaking the law. It would take several men to roll away the stone.

The Jews asked Pilate for a Roman guard to protect the tomb and to make it as secure as they knew how (Matthew 27:66-67). They knew the prophecy of Jesus, that He said He was to rise after three days. We shouldn't suppose that only a few Roman guards were there. The scholars suggest between ten and thirty Roman guards were at the tomb. These were hardened men, capable of gambling over the clothes while crucifying the Lord Jesus. They wouldn't be frightened by a band of disciples wanting to steal a dead body, but they would be frightened by mighty angels who could roll an “extremely large stone” away! God raised Jesus from the dead and declared with power that He is the Son of God (Romans 1:4).

Luke 24:1-7 says: “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’” They had heard the prophecy of His resurrection, but they came to anoint His body. The angels told them to go and tell the apostles. The apostles doubted at first, but Jesus proved Himself to them, appearing over a period of forty days.

Matthew reveals that the guards went into the city and told the chief priests, who gave them a large sum of money to start the rumor that the disciples stole the body while they slept. The priests said if the guards got into trouble with Pilate they would get them out of trouble. Did the disciples steal the body and pretend that He resurrected? First, of all Roman soldiers knew the harsh penalty for sleeping on watch; they wouldn't risk their necks sleeping. Second, only something miraculous like the angels moving the stone would frighten the guards. A small band of untrained Jews wouldn't frighten these soldiers. Third, the soldiers were asleep. How did they know the disciples stole the body if they were sleeping? Fourth, there were

grave clothes left in the tomb. Why would disciples leave the grave clothes and fold them up? Peter and John saw the clothes folded (John 20:6-7). Last, why didn't the Sanhedrin make the apostles, while they were in custody, confess to the crime of stealing the body of Jesus.

All the Jews had to do to prove Jesus didn't rise from the dead was merely to produce the dead body. This would prove the apostles were false witnesses. You can be sure they left no stone unturned in their search for the body of Christ. But they didn't produce a body because they couldn't. Nor were they successful in stopping the preaching about Jesus. From Pentecost onward, the church increased rapidly because the people were convinced Jesus had risen from the dead. They had seen His miraculous power for three years; they knew He was real; and they believed the preaching of the twelve.

The Jewish authorities persecuted the early church. Acts 8:3 says, "But Saul (of Tarsus) was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." But they didn't stop the church; they merely scattered the people. Christians went everywhere preaching the gospel of Christ. Saul went to Damascus to catch some disciples of the Way and take them bound back to Jerusalem. But, God sent a bright light that struck Saul blind, and Jesus revealed himself to Saul, telling him to go into Damascus and there it will be told him what he must do (Acts 9:6).

Saul prayed and fasted for three days. God had a bigger role for Saul. When Saul repented of his sins and was baptized, God washed away his sins (Acts 22:16). Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul who spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel and suffering to tell men of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of the cross, his conversion into the apostle Paul, a believer, reveals the power of the truth about Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. The one who overwhelmingly opposed Jesus Christ (that's Saul) became blind physically for a time, but had his eyes opened spiritually. He became a Christian, an evangelist, and an apostle. I hope your eyes will be opened, too.

Jesus was the most loving, most caring, most truthful person who ever lived. He was truly sinless. You may have many loved ones, but no one has ever loved you like Jesus. No one ever died for your sins but Jesus, and no one else could. First Peter 2:22 says, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." That's what made Him a pure sacrifice for us. First Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." Jesus suffered much for you so that He could bring you to God. In Christ, we have forgiveness of sins; we have eternal life; we have a family in the church; and we have a home in heaven. No one else can offer you these things but Christ.

What will you do with Jesus? You can ignore Him, you can refuse Him, you can oppose Him, or you can follow Him. What you choose will make the difference in your destiny. The Lord Jesus said, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). There are many good reasons to believe in Jesus, and I've only spoken today of a few.

If you believe, repent of your sins and be baptized into Christ. That's how and when your sins are forgiven and you begin your relationship with Him. Baptism is an immersion in water; at that time, God washes away your sins and gives you newness of life (Romans 6:3-7). Won't you become a Christian, today?

I Believe the Bible

The most important book you'll ever read is the Bible because it comes from God. Today, we're exploring reasons to believe the Bible. No other book in the world compares to the Bible! It contains a wealth of information that you need to know to live your life successfully and to have eternal life once this life is over. It gives hope when you're uncertain, peace when you're troubled, comfort when you're hurting, advice when you don't know what to do, and the truth when you're in doubt. The Bible nourishes the soul with the love and grace of God. Make the Bible your daily resource for an abundant life; it has the words of eternal life.

The prophet, speaking from God, said, "I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). God wanted to bless all humanity by giving them in written form His Words that would teach them the truth about every spiritual matter. They could learn about the God who created them, what He expected of them, and how to live a godly and loving life.

Trusting God's wisdom is better than trusting feelings which are fickle or trusting your own intelligence. Sadly, many trust in themselves and ignore what God says. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." People tend to fool themselves, believing what they wish about life and morals; but God's Word is tested and proved. Psalm 12:6 says, "The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times." God's Holy Word, the Bible, will lead you to salvation and eternal life.

Our reading today comes from the Letter to the Hebrews 2:1-4. This gives us reasons to believe that the Word of God comes from God and how we ought to pay close attention to it.

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Yes, we need to pay close attention to the Word of God.

Since the Bible is the Word of God, we ought to see something in it that reveals the divine, the supernatural. Many books claim to be sacred; how do we know whether the Bible is truly from God? God revealed to Moses the signs of a truly inspired prophet. He said, "the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

Predictive prophecy is truly a sign that God is involved. Kenny Barfield, in his excellent book, *The Prophet Motive*, provided six reasonable criteria for assessing the claims of predictive prophecy. Predictive prophecy should occur well in advance of the fulfillment and

should be accurate and conform to historical fact. The fulfillment should occur in an impartial manner and have no evidence of collusion or manipulation; it should be obvious to the reasonable person. Predictive prophecy should be dynamic. It must be ongoing, repetitive, and consistent. The prediction should also suggest supernatural guidance; prediction based on human reasoning or genius is not sufficient.

It was J. Barton Payne who calculated that 27 percent of the entire Bible contains predictive prophecy. Norman Geisler, a scholar, observed that, "This is true of no other book in the world. And it is a sure sign of its divine origin." He added that, "The Bible is the only book in the world that has precise, specific predictions that were made hundreds of years in advance and that were literally fulfilled."

The God of the Bible sets himself apart from all the man-made idols. He is the Creator, not created. God can do what no one else can do. In Isaiah 41, God sends a challenge to those who believed in a false religion. He says, "Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, (he speaks to the idols) you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you" (Isaiah 41:21-24). God, unlike the false gods of ancient times, could tell the future and so prove He was truly God.

When we compare the Bible with other holy books and the writings of the pagan religions, we see a stark difference. Randolph S. Foster, a religious scholar, said, "No well accredited prophecy is found in any other book or even oral tradition now extant, or that has ever been in existence in the world. The oracles of heathenism are not to be classed as exceptions. There is not a single one of them that meets the tests required to prove supernatural agency, which every Scripture prophecy evinces." D. James Kennedy agreed and wrote, "In all the writings of Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tse, you will not find a single example of predicted prophecy. In the Koran (the writings of Muhammad) there is one instance of a specific prophecy—a self-fulfilling prophecy that he, Muhammad himself, would return to Mecca. Well, this is quite different from the prophecy of Jesus who said that He would return from the grave. One is easily fulfilled, and the other is impossible to any human being."

We examined several prophecies about Jesus, the Messiah, last week. Let's look at some other prophecies. The Lord Jesus predicted the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. He said, "Do you not see all these things? (Speaking of Jerusalem and the temple.) Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Matthew 24:2). On August 30, 70 AD, the Roman army led by the future Emperor Titus marched into Jerusalem, burning the city and destroying the temple. The Arch of Titus, which celebrates the sack of Jerusalem and the temple, still stands in Rome. Talking about the fulfillment of that prophecy, Josephus, the Jewish historian, was present at the burning of Jerusalem. Though he was not a believer in Jesus, he reveals that the things spoken by Jesus and written in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are true.

The Old Testament provides numerous examples of proven prophecy. After the fall of Jericho, Joshua, about 1400 BC, prophesied that the city would be rebuilt but at great cost.

Joshua 6:26 says, "Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, 'Cursed before the Lord is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his first-born he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates.'" The fulfillment of this prophecy comes to pass in 870 BC. First Kings 16:34 says, "Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundation with the loss of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun." Because God is divine, He's not restricted by time. He can see the future as clearly as He sees the present. God's omniscience, His all-knowing character, is clearly seen in Scripture.

One of the most specific Old Testament predictions identifies Cyrus of Persia long before he was born. Isaiah 44:28 to 45:1, talks about "The Lord ... who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please'; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.' This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut."

Isaiah made this prediction 150 years before Cyrus was born. Isaiah lived between 740 to 690, about the time of 2 Kings 21 to 25, and Cyrus didn't make his proclamation for Israel to return from exile until 536 according to Ezra 1. There would have been no human way for Isaiah to know the name of Cyrus or what he would do, unless God revealed it to him.

Daniel, who lived in the sixth century, predicted a succession of four great kingdoms in Daniel chapter 2:38-44. So precise and accurate is this prophecy that even critics agree that Daniel spoke in the order of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel identified the first kingdom as Babylon in chapter 2 and gets even more specific about Medo-Persia and Greece in Daniel 8:20-21. Critics try to avoid the supernatural nature of this prophecy by claiming these words were written after the fact, in about 165 BC. But there is no real substantiation for this claim. Jesus, in the days of Rome, the fourth kingdom, set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed, the church! Jesus fulfilled a prophecy made 600 years before. Only God can do that!

Sometimes people claim there are contradictions in Scripture. A classmate of mine in high school suggested this 50 years ago. He gave me a list of 17 alleged contradictions. In those days, I had few resources, but I found answers to these false claims by searching deeper into the language and context of each passage. Through the years, I've collected books that deal with discrepancies and difficulties, studied languages and historical backgrounds of passages. To this day, I have never found one proven contradiction in Scripture. After dealing with biblical difficulties for more than forty years, Dr. Gleason Archer, a biblical scholar, said in the foreword of his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*: "There is a good and sufficient answer in Scripture, Scripture itself, to refute every charge that has ever been leveled against it. But this is only to be expected from the kind of book that the Bible asserts itself to be, the inscripturation of the infallible, inerrant Word of the Living God." Archer is right; scripture will validate itself! I also highly recommend my friend, Eric Lyon's two volumes, *The Anvil Rings*, published by Apologetics Press. Don't fall for the idea that there are no answers to the charges that people make against the Bible. Through the ages, critics have made all kinds of charges, but the Bible stands and remains the best seller of all time, translated into more than 2,000 languages.

God has given us a great gift in Scripture. He shares in Scripture His wisdom and promises of forgiveness and eternal life. The Scriptures call people to live lovingly, morally, and kindly. The story of the cross calls us to give ourselves and serve with love. Christ calls us to follow His example, and the Scriptures teach us how He lived and what He taught. Scripture teaches us right and wrong and how to live the best life. The Lord, through Scripture, calls us to an abundant life filled with grace and truth. Nothing could be nobler or higher.

David described what the teachings of God's Word are like, "They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:10-11). Did you know that Jesus challenges us to test His Words to see if they are from God? The Lord Jesus said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." (Speaking of God.) "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:16-17). When people truly follow the teaching of Jesus, they find peace in their souls, joy in His promises, hope of eternal life, and grace to live each day.

The person who hasn't studied the Word of God has missed a precious treasure. Proverbs 2:4-12 speaks of the value of God's wisdom: "If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things."

Some think the Bible is so old that it no longer matters, but the Bible is still relevant for many reasons. First, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Second, just because it's old doesn't mean it's not for our time. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

The Bible addresses the most relevant questions: Where did we come from? Why we are here? What is important in life? What will happen when life is over? What is right and wrong? How do I treat my neighbor? How does God save us from sin? The Bible addresses everything that pertains to life and godliness. It provides rules to live by and examples of righteous living. The Bible introduces us to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who loves us and taught us how to love. The Bible is the most relevant and the wisest book you'll ever read. You'll cheat yourself out of great treasure by failing to read the Word of God.

God wants you not only to read His Word, He also wants you to obey it. Place your faith in Jesus Christ and confess Him, repent of your sins, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). When you're baptized God will add you to His church and make you His child. Keep on studying and remaining faithful to the Lord all your days. Get involved in church and serve the Lord. Get started today!

I Believe in the Church

Many people think you can be a good Christian without being a member of any church. Is church really necessary? Today, we're exploring how God regards the church, and you can't afford to miss this study! We know the Lord's way is the best way, the right way, and the holy way of life. The best way to know the Lord's way is to study the Scriptures. They are God's voice to us today. They were true when the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets to write them, and they're true for all time.

When you mention the word "church," people respond in a multitude of ways. Some think of the church as something good, but optional. Some think of the church as an institution. Some think the church is made up of prejudiced hypocrites. Some think the church needs reinventing in a style more like the culture of our times. Everyone seems to think they know what the church should be like. Even folks who've never read a Bible or have not entered a church door in many years have an opinion about what the church should be.

You've probably noticed religion in America has changed. Many groups have become religious entertainment venues and others have become like shopping malls. Some think the primary purpose of church is to cater to our wants and desires. We've become self-centered, thinking Jesus ought to be our servant rather than thinking we ought to be His. It's no wonder some see the church as optional and others as a waste of time. Few want to know what Christ envisioned for the church that He built or what place it has in His heart. The Lord never thought of the church as an option; it's necessary in His eyes.

Our reading today comes from Acts 20:28-32. Paul is meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus. It is a very sad occasion as he's saying goodbye to them.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

False religion and false churches should never stop us in our pursuit for true faith and true churches.

Yes, the Lord Jesus considered the church as necessary. He wants everyone to be a member of His church and to worship with the church regularly. The idea that you can be a good Christian and not be a member of the church is not from the heart of God. A close look at the New Testament reveals that the church is quite necessary to our relationship with the Lord.

The church Jesus built doesn't belong to you or me; it belongs to the Lord. He built it! After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is, the confession) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18), Yes, Jesus built His church, and not even His death could prevent it.

The church belongs to the Lord because He purchased it. The apostle Paul by inspirations

told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how can we think so little of it? The church must be precious, very precious, to the Lord.

The Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to the church, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Just as your head is inseparably connected to your body, so Christ is inseparably connected to the church. Just as your body does your will as it's conceived in the brain, so the church does the will of its head, Jesus Christ. The church is the fullness of Christ. We must never, never, never, separate Christ from His church or the church from Christ.

The church is extremely precious to the Lord; in fact, He considers the church as His bride. The Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus has gone to great lengths to bless and to sanctify the church. He wants her to be radiant with glory. Jesus values the church.

When people slander the church or make it trivial, they mock and they insult Jesus Christ. They're saying Jesus is foolish to sanctify and glorify the church. If you wish to make a man angry, just slander his wife. Do you think the Lord Jesus will look kindly on anyone who slanders His bride?

I want to distinguish the church that the Lord Jesus calls His bride from what people today think when they hear the word "church." What I'm speaking about is the Lord's church that's described in the New Testament. Many religious groups who call themselves "churches" are nothing like the New Testament church. They differ in name, in organization, in doctrine, in mission, and in worship. They're often more a reflection of our culture than what God intended for the church to be. Some groups have so little spiritual value and content, it's no wonder people see it as unnecessary.

This difference confuses and causes people to stray from the will of God. More than ever, people need to know the truth revealed in God's Word about the church. They need to think clearly about what God desires rather than be pulled into some false hope by something that calls itself church but differs greatly from the church that Jesus built as found in the New Testament. The Scriptures clearly make the church that Jesus built a necessity for us if we wish to please God.

Why is the church so necessary? There are several reasons. First, the Lord adds those He saves to His church. When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter preach, they were pierced to the heart and they wanted to know what to do. Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2:41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." In verse 47, the Bible says, "And the Lord was adding to their number (or "to the church") day by day those who were being saved." The Lord forgives us at baptism and adds us to His church. Baptism is the time that they we are forgiven or saved.

When a person is saved, the Lord adds him to His church. To be in the church means the Lord has saved you. The Scriptures never contemplate a person who is saved as a person who

hasn't been baptized or a person who is not in the Lord's church. The apostle Paul told the church at Colossae, "For He (that is, God) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Just as the Lord grants forgiveness when one repents and is baptized, so the Lord adds the baptized to His church. The church is the kingdom of Christ!

When John wrote to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1, he revealed to them what Christ had done for them. The Bible says, "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:4-6).

The book of Revelation addresses the people who had come into a kingdom and were priests to God. John taught that "we" Christians "are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). There are but two kingdoms, just two: the domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son. To enter the church is to enter the kingdom of the beloved Son.

The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of the church as a kingdom. The Lord said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). Why would the Lord build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else? He doesn't do that. The church is the kingdom of God today.

How do I know that? In Acts 20:28, the Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. We have no record anywhere in the New Testament that the blood of Jesus ever purchased anything but the church. But the twenty-four elders sang this new song to the Lord Jesus, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10). The same blood didn't purchase two things—the church is that blood-bought kingdom.

Second, being in the church means you're blood-bought, but there's no promise of being blood-bought to those outside the church. The church contains the cleansed, but the others outside are still in sin. The kingdom contains priests to God, but outside there are no priests to God. The Bible says, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Being in the Lord's church is vital to our eternal salvation.

Ephesians 2 contrasts the difference between people who are in the world and outside of Christ from those who come into Christ and His church. The apostle Paul reminds those who came out of paganism at Ephesus of what they were before they became members of the church or the body of Christ. He says, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13). In verses 19 to 22, Paul describes them after they became Christians. He says, "So then you are no longer

strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Before, they were strangers without hope and without God. Now, as Christians, they're God's family and fellow citizens in God's kingdom, the church.

Third, the church is necessary because being in the church means that you are a member of God's family. Paul told Timothy, "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household (or family) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support (or ground) of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul identified the church as God's household or family. The children of God are in the church. If you claim to be in God's family but say church membership is unnecessary, you're confused and may be deceiving yourself.

The very act that puts one into the family of God is what puts one into the church. Compare Galatians 3:26-27 with 1 Corinthians 12:13. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism is an act of faith that makes us children of God. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." This verse says that we're baptized into the one body. Ephesians 1:22-23 teaches the body of Christ is the church. Therefore, baptism is what makes one a child of God and baptism is what puts us into the body of Christ, the church.

When we realize the church is God's family, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the saved, those bought by the blood of Jesus, we see why the church is so very important in God's eyes. Being a member of the Lord's church is not optional. Are you a member of the church that Jesus built? I hope you are.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't active. They've stopped worshiping at church or supporting it. By their actions they've actually abandoned the church and in that sense they've abandoned the Lord. The Bible says, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). The Lord wants us to encourage each other to love and good works and to not forsake assembling with other Christians. You can't encourage other Christians to stay faithful if you quit going to church altogether.

I know some of you can't attend worship because of your health. The Lord understands your situation. But if you can attend worship yet choose to forsake meeting with the Lord's church, you're forsaking the Lord, too. The Lord loves His people and knows His church. If you quit serving Him, He knows it. When you stop attending, you also open the door to temptation of every kind. To stay spiritually healthy, stay in church.

To become a member of the church and to be saved, believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; repent of your sins; confess Jesus as the Christ; and be baptized. When you're baptized, the blood of Jesus will wash away your sins and cause you to be added to the church. You'll become a child of God, born again into His family. If you're a member of the church of Christ and have stopped attending, why not come back to the Lord and to the church. Get right with God.

I Believe in Morality

Every person has a sensitivity to right and wrong, a moral sense. Only God could give us our sense of morality. We didn't get it from the rocks; and we didn't inherit it from animals. No, God made us moral beings! God gave us the Scriptures to define what is right and wrong, to help us avoid what's evil, and to practice what's good. The more we study and practice what God has revealed in Scripture, the stronger we'll become spiritually. Whether we obey God matters, and the Scriptures teach us how to love and to obey the Lord Jesus. It teaches us to avoid sin and to live righteously.

Each of us has within our soul a moral faculty called a conscience that accuses us when we do what's wrong and excuses us when we do what is right. When we violate our consciences, we feel the pain of guilt and shame. We feel guilty because we know we have sinned; we feel ashamed that we're the kind of person who could do something so wrong. Even the most evil people know in their hearts when they have been evil. Everyone has a conscience. Sin defiles the conscience, but the blood of Christ can cleanse our consciences.

Thankfully, God trains our consciences, and He does it through the Scriptures so that we can avoid sinning against God and defiling our hearts. When people don't know the Scriptures, they may fool themselves into thinking what they have done is right, when God actually regards it as wrong. Paul said that he had lived "in all good conscience up to this day" (Acts 23:1). Before he became a Christian, he thought it was right to persecute the church, to put people in prison, and to blaspheme the name of Jesus Christ. When he learned the truth, he repented of his sins; and when he was baptized, God washed them away.

Our reading, today, comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 2:19-22. He talks about our relationship with the Lord. How we live matters to God.

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

What a good reading. Pursue righteousness. Let's pray together. Father, help us to pursue Your will, to please You in all things. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Our moral senses aren't physical, but spiritual and God-given. To suggest that we're moral beings because we evolved from non-living matter or from animals isn't rational. Our self-awareness and our ability to evaluate the morality of our thoughts and behaviors must arise from being made in the image of God. We are moral beings who judge ourselves and judge what we see and experience in this life. This moral sense is a universal experience, found in every age and culture of mankind.

In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened to both right and wrong. They discovered that they were naked, so they "sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths." When the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they

“hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” They felt guilt from having disobeyed God and they were afraid of His finding out. They were ashamed of being naked, and Eve knew the serpent had deceived her. Only people made in God’s image ever have these emotions or feel guilt.

There is a universal law of God that’s higher than human law. Just because something is legal in the eyes of a society doesn’t make it right in God’s eyes. Dick Szanyo, my friend in Pelham, Alabama, reminded me of the Nuremburg trials after World War II. When the famous trials occurred, the Nazis defense was simple: “you’re trying us based on British law, or American law. We were obeying German law, so you have no right to accuse us of the murder of anyone.” Robert Jackson, who prosecuted the case, argued that the Nazis weren’t guilty because they violated British law, American law, or even German law. They were being judged by a law higher than the “provincial and the transient.” What they did was always wrong, for all persons, in all places, and at all times!

My friend, Dick Szanyo, concluded, “Evolution does not and cannot account for this moral sensitivity. Individual humans cannot account for this “oughtness” that we all experience. Neither can groups of humans (like the Americans, English, or Germans) account for these truths. They cannot be found in the physics, or chemistry, or biology of Naturalism (that is, that nothing exists but a physical universe). Indeed, the only thing that can account for this common moral experience is a Supernatural Moral Lawgiver. This is what we mean by God.”

Jeremiah knew the nature of man was to downplay sin and even deceive himself about it. The prophet wrote, “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Man left to his own devices will try to justify whatever he says or does. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.” People can do very foolish, hurtful things simply because they want to. Love for sin will cause people to ignore all the warnings and plunge themselves into ruin. Proverbs 16:2 says, “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.”

You can fool yourself; you can fool your family and your friends; but you cannot fool God. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.” Nothing escapes the notice of God. What we think is trivial may be a serious matter to God. God loves us, but He cannot and will not overlook sin. The prophet spoke about God, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13). Our consciences are a moral governor, but they must be brought into harmony with the will of God.

The serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, was a sexual predator and a cannibal of his homosexual lovers. Though Dahmer had been brought up to believe in God, he was exposed to atheistic evolution which devastated his faith in God. Dahmer placed the blame for his murders on his atheistic beliefs and in the theory of evolution. From these beliefs, he found no reason to respect human dignity or life. In his interview with Dateline NBC, Dahmer said, “If you don’t...think that there is a God to be accountable to [and no atheistic evolutionist does]...what’s the point of trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges? That’s how I thought, anyway. I always believed the theory of evolution as truth, that we all just came from the slime. When we...died, you know, that was it, there was nothing.”

Lionel Dahmer, Jeffrey’s father, gave this explanation for Jeffrey’s thinking in A&E’s Biography of Jeffrey Dahmer: *The Monster Within*, which aired in 1996. Jeffrey believed, “If it

all happens naturalistically, what's the need for a God? Can't I set my own rules? Who owns me? I own myself." God and morality are unalterably connected to each other. A good, holy, and pure God gives us the foundation for our faith and for our morals. God created us and owns us all, whether we realize it or not. Romans 14:12 says, "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God."

In fact, Christians do not own themselves. They have no right to participate in immoral behavior. The Corinthians were well-known for being sexually immoral people. Paul said, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Sin has a high price to pay. If you want to live with God, you must leave sin.

Paul explained, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man (the one who commits fornication) sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). When Jesus died on the cross, He bought us to redeem us from sin at the cost of His own blood. It's vital to our souls that we realize that we are not our own. We belong to Jesus Christ!

When people imagine that they can do as they please and aren't accountable to God, there's no limit to the evil they will do. Fyodor Dostoevsky in his book *The Brothers Karamasov* examined the thoughts of Ivan Karamasov who believed that "if God did not exist, everything would be permitted" or lawful. Though Dostoevsky didn't use those exact words, his character Ivan did say on page 72, "There is no virtue if there is no immortality." He toyed with the idea that there's nothing moral, nothing good or evil, because there is no God. In the end, all that kind of thinking brought was pain and regret. The historian and humanist, Will Durant, said, "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion." George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible."

God not only sees our behavior, He knows and tests our hearts. God said through Jeremiah the prophet, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). God sees things as they truly are! You can't spin a lie with God; He'll see right through it. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Because God knows us, we should make it our aim to please Him in every way.

Our relationship with God ought to direct our thinking, our words, and our behavior. God said, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I (God speaking) am holy'" (1 Peter 1:13-16). A holy person keeps himself free

from the ways of sin.

The Hebrew writer said, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12-13). God loves you and will do everything He can to keep you from falling away in sin which leads to unbelief.

Hebrews 10:26-31 warns, “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Don’t let sin overwhelm you with grief and despair. God’s love and grace provide the way to salvation. The wicked won’t inherit the kingdom of God, but they can repent and change. The Lord Jesus will help you become a different person with a clear conscience. After listing several sins, Paul said, “Such were some of you (that is, you sinned in all these things); but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). You don’t have to remain enslaved by what you were. God can wash you, make you holy, and justify you! You can become a child of God and live a new life filled with love and hope and eternal life.

Let’s pray together. O Father, help us to flee the things that are wrong and to chase after the things that are right, righteousness, and faith, and love, and hope. Give us strength, Father, to do Your will every single day. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

When our conscience stings from our sins, and we realize how our sins are painful and can us cost our souls, we start looking for forgiveness and a clean conscience. Guilt and shame will cause a person to despise himself or herself. You may not like what you see when you look in the mirror. Does your conscience sting? What are you doing about it? Some people ignore their consciences and become callous to sin. They don’t care what they do or whom they hurt. I worry more about the person with a seared conscience than I do for the one who feels guilt. Why? It’s because that pain, a godly grief, may cause him to repent.

Second Corinthians 7:10 says, “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Your God-given conscience isn’t a curse. It’s God opening our eyes about what’s wrong so that we may pursue what’s right and be saved. Guilt grieves us, but God offers us a clean conscience! In Christ, we have forgiveness and hope. We can be born again and walk in newness of life. The old man of sin dies so that we can be free from sin and raised with Christ!

Trust in the Lord and confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Let your grief over sin lead you to repent and turn from evil to the Lord. When you do, you’re ready to be baptized! In baptism God washes away sin (Acts 22:16), causes us to be born again (John 3:5), and makes us His child (Galatians 3:27). He also gives us newness of life free from sin (Romans 6:3-7). Why not turn your life around and come to the Lord?