

Preaching  
the Whole  
Counsel of God  
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Sermon Outlines  
by Louis Rushmore

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# Peace, Peace When There Is No Peace

## Jeremiah 6:14

**Thesis:** To emphasize that true peace only comes through one's uncompromising alignment with God.

### Introduction:

1. Jeremiah summarized, verbalized and critiqued the message of the false prophets of his day in the southern kingdom of Judah, Jer. 6:14.
  - a. False prophets essentially said "All is well" when, in fact, disaster loomed on the close horizon.
  - b. "The prophets and priests assure the people that all is well, even while calamity is hovering over them" (*Wycliffe*).
  - c. The moral and religious fiber of the nation of Judah was corrupted at every level from people to priests, prophets and kings, Jer. 5:31; 23:11, 14; 32:32.
  - d. Therefore, God determined to allow a foreign nation to capture Jerusalem and defeat Judah, Jer. 20:4-6; 21:2-10.
  - e. Jeremiah prophesied of God's coming punishment and called upon his nation to repent, while false prophets presented an alternative, more pleasing but false message.
2. Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet while he was yet a young man, Jer. 1:6.

It was in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, 629 BC, that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. At that time the kingdom of Judah enjoyed unbroken peace. Since the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's host before the gates of Jerusalem in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, 714 BC, Judah had no longer had much to fear from the imperial power of Assyria. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

- a. Jeremiah, both a priest and a prophet, often was considered the suffering and weeping prophet, Jer. 1:1, 6; 9:1.

- b. Adam Clarke thinks that Jeremiah was about 14 years old when he was called to be a prophet whereas Albert Barnes supposes that Jeremiah was about 20 years old when he became a prophet.
  - c. Clarke believes Jeremiah was a prophet for 40 years.
  - d. The prophetic ministry of Jeremiah spanned the reign of five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoichin, Jehoichim and Zedekiah (Clarke).
3. Jeremiah had a message from God that no one wanted to hear.
- a. Jeremiah tried unsuccessfully to restrain himself from preaching the unpopular pending judgments of God, Jer. 20:9.
  - b. “Jeremiah was in derision, literally a laughing stock, because he cried out. So, he thought he would stop crying out. He could not stop, because the Word of God was a fire in his bones, and he had to speak out” (Davidson 592).
  - c. Jeremiah was severely mistreated and about to be murdered as had other of God’s prophets been murdered due to the unpopularity of God’s message through them, Jer. 20:1-2; 26:8, 20-23; 38:4-6.
4. There was no peace with God no matter how often the words were repeated (“peace, peace”) as long as Jerusalem and Judah continued to practice moral and religious depravity.
- a. God’s judgment against Jerusalem and Judah was a certainty, and ignoring divine revelation or attacking God’s messenger did not change God’s judgment and pending punishment.
  - b. Only sincere repentance could have averted judgment and punishment against Jerusalem and Judah, Jer. 6:16; 26:3, 13.

**Body:**

**I. The time period during which Jeremiah prophesied was especially turbulent with Egypt, Assyria and Babylon each attempting to control the Fertile Crescent.**

- A. Assyria controlled the Fertile Crescent when Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah.
  - 1. In 722 B.C., because of its sins, God had allowed Assyria to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, deporting all but the poorest people to other lands controlled by Assyria
  - 2. In 701 B.C., under the leadership of Sennacherib, Assyria also conquered several cities in Judah and laid

- siege to Jerusalem, but divine intervention killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers camped outside Jerusalem, 2 Kings 19:35.
3. Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, briefly removed and carried away King Manasseh from Judah's throne, 2 Chron. 33:11-13.
- B. Egypt reasserted itself by making an alliance with its former enemy Assyria in an effort to fight off the prospect of Babylon rising to power and controlling the Fertile Crescent.
1. King Josiah of Judah, an ally of Babylon, died in a failed attempt to prevent the Egyptian army from uniting with the Assyrian forces to fight Babylon.
  2. Consequently, Egypt took control of Jerusalem, making Jerusalem and Judah enemies of Babylon.
- C. In 612 B.C. with the fall of Assyria's capital, Nineveh, Babylon successfully defeated the combined Egyptians and the Assyrians to take control of the Fertile Crescent.
1. Subsequently, Babylon defeated and took control of Jerusalem in 606 B.C., with captives (including the prophet Daniel) taken to Babylon on this occasion; the "first taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, is the commencement of the seventy years of Judah's Chaldean bondage, foretold by Jeremiah in Jer 25:11..."(*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. In 597 B.C., Judah rebelled against the Babylonians, but upon the commencement of a second siege by Babylon, led by its king, Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem surrendered; King Jehoiachin and other captives were taken to Babylon, among whom was the prophet Ezekiel.
  3. After Jerusalem and Judah rebelled again, Babylon reconquered Jerusalem and destroyed it in 587 B.C.; the prophet Jeremiah served in Jerusalem as God's spokesman to whom neither commoner nor king would hearken.

## **II. God's message through the prophet Jeremiah was contested and contradicted by false prophets.**

- A. Jeremiah prophesied that a captivity of 70 years would occur.
1. The prophet Jeremiah explicitly proclaimed that

- Israelites would be captives in Babylon for 70 years, Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10.
2. The counter message by the false prophets was that there would not be a captivity in Babylon, and if some were taken captive to Babylon that it would not be for long, Jer. 27:9, 14; 28:11.
- B. Jeremiah prophesied that the city of Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed.
1. God spoke through the prophet about the certainty of Jerusalem's destruction as well as the specific reasons for which God determined to have the city destroyed, Jer. 32:28-36.
  2. False prophets denied that Judah and Jerusalem would be devastated, Jer. 13:14-15; 37:19.
  3. The captivity of which Jeremiah prophesied lasted from 606 B.C. to 536 B.C. when the Persians, new rulers of the Fertile Crescent, set captive peoples free.
  4. The city of Jerusalem was thoroughly destroyed in 587 B.C.
- C. Judah had diminished its sinfulness and denied that God would punish it, Jer. 6:14.
1. Judah viewed its sins of immorality, idolatry, lying and many other sins as relatively insignificant and of minor concern.
  2. Judah persuaded itself that going through some outward motions of practicing Judaism was sufficient remedy to its sinfulness.
  3. The very religious leaders among the prophets and priests who should have led the way in righteousness not only corrupted themselves but they concealed from the people God's true revelation.
  4. Religious and political leaders assured the population that all was well between Judah and God, plus that Judah had nothing to fear from the political upheaval on either side of them in the Fertile Crescent.

<p>Jer 6:14 Hurt - the spiritual wound. Slightly - as if it were but a slight wound; or, in a slight manner, pronouncing all sound where there is no soundness. Saying - namely, the prophets and priests (Jer 6:13). Whereas they ought to warn the people of impending</p>
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judgments and the need of repentance, they say there is nothing to fear. Peace - including soundness. All is sound in the nation's moral state, so all will be peace as to its political state (Jer 4:10; 8:11; 14:13; 23:17; Ezek 13:5,10; 22:28). (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

### **III. Some principles respecting Jeremiah's statement in Jeremiah 6:14 apply today as well.**

- A. It is possible even for the children of God to practice superficial religion.

Some members live in such a way so as to hinder the influence of the church in their community. Christians should conduct themselves in a way that would promote growth rather than hinder it (I Peter 2:12). Every member should remember the words spoken by the Lord in Matthew 5:16, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Our actions will promote or hinder church growth. (Smith 627)

1. Superficial religion provides a false security, false hope and false peace, Matt. 15:9.

Here is a case in which hope is held out, but it is a deceived hope. The false prophets were promising peace when all the while the judgment of God against them was in rapid preparation. ...the false prophets denied the judgment of God and promised victory and prosperity when God had said they were facing war, death, and deportation! (Manasco 261).

2. Even the children of God can be in denial of sins and their consequences, Matt. 7:3.
  3. "Jeremiah was dealing with God's people, who obviously did not think anything was wrong with what they were doing. ...The people were led into error by those who knew better" (Stacks 778-779).
- B. Usually, even the children of God when they sin view the righteous as 'troublers in Israel,'" 1 Kings 18:17-18.
1. To be pleasing to God, one must do things exactly as God instructs, Col. 3:17.
  2. Some Christians in the first century considered the apostle Paul to be their enemy when he preached and

taught the Gospel truth, Gal. 4:16.

- C. Mankind must recognize that God and not man makes the rules for morality and religion, Jer. 10:23.
1. Of course, this principle is applicable to modern nations as it was applicable to the southern kingdom of Judah.

The Lord is the only one, and His way is the only way in which one can turn. Judah had not totally forgotten God. They wanted God to be there when they needed Him, but they wanted to live as they pleased. Turning to the Lord can only be on His terms. We cannot tell the Lord on what conditions we will serve Him. Judah thought they could do as they pleased, and God would still be with them. I believe America today feels and acts the same way. (Stacks 783)

2. Our nation, religious people and even members of the Lord's church often want peace with God and their fellows on their own terms, rather than on God's terms, Rom. 10:1-3.
- D. Sometimes it is impossible and sinful to have peace instead of division, Psa. 120:7.
1. "There are times when God wants war, not peace—opposition, not submission—separation, not unity" (Showalter 22).
  2. Peace at any cost, especially at the cost of biblical truth, is a price too high to pay.
  3. The goal, of course, ought to be to have peace with all men, Rom. 12:18.

Faithful brethren should do all that is within their power to maintain the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). This is, of course, accomplished only when brethren walk by the same rule (Phil. 3:16). But, this unity was/is not to be purchased at the expense of either truth or righteousness. Some division is required of those who desire to follow the Lord. For instance, if men refuse either to come to the truth, or to remain in the truth, brethren must not extend fellowship to them (II Thess. 3:6f.; John 12:42; II John 9-11; I John 2:18f.). Such a refusal of fellowship is, in effect, a division,

since they would be divided off from one another in a spiritual sense. Another example is in the area of moral living. If and when brethren refuse to practice righteous living, the church has an obligation to withdraw fellowship from the erring member. (Sztanyo 7)

4. "...Christ was both a champion of religious division and religious unity! It is incumbent upon each of us to recognize the principles which govern each of these demands of our Lord" (Sztanyo 7).

God's children should maintain unity and promote peace whenever possible! But, at the same time, followers of Jehovah must declare war and enforce division whenever needed!" (Sztanyo 8).

Bible unity is not just "going along to get along." For some time, many members of the church have thought that just getting along without problems was unity. This is much like those in Jeremiah's day who cried, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11). It is truly sad to see this sort of attitude in the church. Of course this idea of unity is not a true conception of Biblical unity. (Smith 622)

- E. False prophets abound today as they did in Jeremiah's day, 1 John 4:1.
  1. Some false prophets are members of the Lord's church, 2 Pet. 2:1-2.
  2. Denominationalism offers the pretense of peace when there is no peace thereby; after all regarding false prophets (preachers), "[s]ome preach some truth" (Davidson 593).
  3. Like Jeremiah, God's preachers today must preach the pure Word of God irrespective of whether those who hear it like it, 2 Tim. 4:2-4.
  4. Religious leaders, inside or outside of the church, can deceive all who hear their messages, 2 Cor. 11:13-15.
  5. It's the same today as it was in Jeremiah's day, in that "...the prophets prophesied falsely; and the people continued in sin, being deceived by the priests and the prophets" (Clarke).

6. However, the children of God cannot have peace with a false teacher, Rom. 16:17-18; Eph. 5:11.
- F. After awhile, sin causes one's senses to be desensitized.
1. The apostle Paul referred to it as a seared conscience, 1 Tim. 4:2.
  2. "The hardened sinners of Israel had lost all sense of shame and had no feelings either of regret or remorse for their transgressions. There remained absolutely nothing else for God to do except to visit the people with divine punishment" (Coffman).

**Conclusion:**

1. Christians must opt for scriptural peace.
2. Peace at any price is not the peace of God.

Peace comes by following God's Word wholly, completely, and unashamedly. The peace that Jesus gives us and that which we must maintain cannot be compromised. Jesus at no time taught us by example, inference, or commandment that peace could be maintained at the expense of truth. Submission to that divine law is the only way of peace. ...Seeking true peace does not include the support of error or the acceptance of those teaching error. (Cox 71-72)

**Invitation:**

1. True peace only comes through one's uncompromising alignment with God.
2. One must become a Christian on divine terms, Mark 16:16.
3. One must continue to be a faithful Christian, Rev. 2:10; Acts 8:22.

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# Ask for the Old Paths

## Jeremiah 6:16

**Thesis:** To demonstrate that God has always desired to save mankind from his sins, but impenitent mankind has always resisted God's grace and mercy.

**Song:** *Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah; Lead Me Gently Home, Father*

### **Introduction:**

1. God has always desired to save mankind from his sins, but impenitent mankind has always resisted God's grace and mercy, Eph. 2:8-9.
2. Since God continues to offer salvation to humanity, the only reason that souls remain lost is because of human refusal to accept salvation on God's terms.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Jeremiah 6:16 is one of those standout verses of Scripture, and especially worthy of our exposition and special attention.**

- A. "Saith" can be variously translated, including with the words "charge," "command," "demand" and "require."
  1. God through the prophet Jeremiah charged, commanded, demanded and required the nation of Judah to abide in his divine instructions.
  2. The phrase "thus saith the Lord" appears 414 times in the Old Testament, and numerous other times among the 1262 times "saith" appears in both testaments of the Bible it refers to communication from God to man.
  3. In addition, God obviously addressed mankind with his divine instruction with the use of other words and phrases, e.g. "the word of the LORD came," Gen. 15:1; 2 Sam. 7:4 (phrase appears 92 times in the Old Testament).
  4. The apostle Peter summarized how mankind became aware of God's divine instructions, 2 Pet. 1:20-21.
- B. "The LORD" comes from the Hebrew word "Yehovah (yeh-ho-vaw')," which means "(the) self-Existent or Eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God" (*Biblesoft's*).

1. There are 5,000 instances in the Old Testament of the KJV where the capitalized “LORD” appears indicating it means “Jehovah.”
  2. “The divine name YHWH appears only in the Bible. ...God chose it as His personal name by which He related specifically to His chosen or covenant people” (Vine).
- C. “Stand ye” is sometimes translated also as “remain” and “continue.”
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to “stand,” “remain” and “continue” “in the ways.”
  2. Today, mankind must “stand” in the Gospel, 1 Cor. 15:1; Eph. 6:14.
- D. “The ways” means “a road (as trodden); figuratively, a course of life or mode of action” (*Biblesoft’s*).
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to maintain a specified “course of life or mode of action.”
  2. Isaiah called upon the people of God to opt for the highway of holiness, Isa. 35:8.
  3. Likewise, Jesus Christ called upon humanity to be selective regarding the course chosen, which leads to eternity, Matt. 7:13-14.
- E. “And see” is sometimes translated as “approve,” “experience,” “heed,” “regard” and “respect.”
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to approve, experience, heed, regard and respect “the ways.”
  2. Men today must also heed the doctrine of Christ, 1 Tim. 4:16; Heb. 2:1; 2 Pet. 1:19.
- F. “And ask” is sometimes translated as “demand,” “desire” and “request.”
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to demand, desire and request “the old paths.”
  2. People today need to “ask” God (through his Word, the Bible) for instruction, rather than appealing to the ideas and whims of men in religion, Jam. 1:5.
- G. The word “old” is sometimes translated “eternal,”

“everlasting” and “perpetual.”

1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to abide in the eternal, everlasting and perpetual “paths,” i.e. that God had directed them through divine instruction.
  2. “Ask for the old paths, the paths prescribed by the law of God, the written word, that true standard of antiquity. Ask for the paths that the patriarchs travelled in before you, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and, as you hope to inherit the promises made to them, tread in their steps” (Henry).
- H. “Paths” means “to tramp; a (beaten) track” (*Biblesoft’s*).
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to abide in the spiritual trail blazed by God himself through his servants the prophets.
  2. This direction in Jer. 6:16 to look to the past is not singular to this prophetic book, Deut. 32:7; Job 8:8.
- I. The word “good” is sometimes translated as “best,” “pleasant” and “welfare.”
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to conduct themselves in the best way, which is really a pleasant way and which contributes to their physical and spiritual welfare.
  2. Vine says of the Hebrew word for “good” here that it “often qualifies a common object or activity” and when “contrasted with evil has moral overtones.”
- J. “And walk” means “to carry (in various senses)” and is sometimes translated as “go” (*Biblesoft’s*).
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to go only in the spiritual path that he specified through divine instruction, cf. Jer. 7:23.
  2. Likewise, Isaiah called upon the people of God to “walk” in God’s specified “way,” Isa. 30:21.
- K. “Therein” is sometimes translated as “within.”
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to conduct itself solely within the boundaries of divine instruction.
  2. Using the illustration of a road, we might say to “keep it between the ditches.”
- L. The words “ye shall find” mean “to attain...or acquire” and

can be translated “get” (*Biblesoft’s*).

1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to attain, acquire or get “rest for your souls,” only attainable through the path God designated.
  2. The Hebrew word for “find” here “refers to ‘finding’ someone or something that is lost or misplaced, or ‘finding’ where it is” (Vine).
  3. Judah of Jeremiah’s day had misplaced the Word of God from their hearts and lives.
- M. The word “rest” means “a resting place” (*Biblesoft’s*).
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to make acquisition of “a resting place” for their souls their primary, all-important pursuit in life, cf. Ecc. 12:13.
  2. Jesus Christ, likewise, offers rest for our souls, Matt. 11:28-29.
  3. There remains a primary resting place toward all faithful children of God of all ages march, Heb. 4:9-11.
- N. The words “for your souls” in this context refers to the spirit side of humanity.
1. God through the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Judah to think about the spiritual welfare of their souls before indulging in either the permissible but secondary matters of life or perhaps devoting themselves to sinful pleasures, cf. Matt. 6:33; Heb. 11:25.
  2. One’s soul is his prized possession in this life and for eternity, Matt. 16:26.
- O. The words “but they said” come from the same Hebrew word earlier used respecting God, “saith.”
1. The people of Jeremiah’s day countered what God had said, charged, commanded, demanded and required.
  2. The people of Jeremiah’s day articulated with the same force as God’s divine instructions what they perceived to be a better idea, cf. Jer. 18:12.
- P. The nation of Judah in Jeremiah’s day mimicked God in their refusal to obey him.
1. The phrase “we will not walk therein” resorts to the same words Jehovah used in his divine instruction,

only Jeremiah's generation employed those words back at God in obstinate refusal to obey God.

2. "Thus multitudes are ruined for ever by downright willfulness" (Henry).
3. Judah was persistent in its willful and sinful rejection of God, Jer. 44:16.

## II. Summarized, what were the original recipients of Jer. 6:16 expected to understand.

- A. First, God had not left mankind and especially in the time of Jeremiah, the nation of Judah, without divine instruction.
  1. "The Lord has not left any lack of instruction and warning. He has marked out for them the way of salvation in the history of the ancient times" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. Even a casual reading of the Bible evidences communication from God from the Garden of Eden with which the Bible commences to the final visions of the apostle John recorded in the last book of the Bible.
- B. Generally, God's dealings with humanity from Creation onward evidence ample instruction from God so as to know assuredly how to please or displease God.
  1. "Thus the paths of the old time are here the ways in which Israel's godly ancestors have trod; meaning substantially, the patriarchs' manner of thinking and acting" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. The "old paths" were "[t]he ways of the patriarchs and of the fathers who experienced redemption from Egypt" (*Wycliffe*).
  3. "Look inquiringly backwards to ancient history (Deut 32:7), and see how success and enduring prosperity forsook your fathers when they left the way prescribed to them by God, to walk in the ways of the heathen (18:15); learn that there is but one way, the way of the fear of Jahveh, on which blessing and salvation are to be found (32:39-40)" (Graf qtd. in *Keil & Delitzsch*).
- C. Every soul who has reached an age of accountability for his actions must personally choose a path in life, either one designated by God or one of his own lustful choice, 1 John 2:15-17.
  1. "Let us observe the metaphor. A traveler is going to a

particular city; he comes to a place where the road divides into several paths, he is afraid of going astray; he stops short,-endeavours to find out the right path: he cannot fix his choice. At last he sees another traveler; he inquires of him, gets proper directions-proceeds on his journey-arrives at the desired place-and reposes after his fatigue” (Clarke).

2. “Image from travelers who have lost their road, stopping and inquiring which is the right way on which they once had been, but from which they have wandered” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
  3. Again, Jesus portrayed life’s choices as the selection either of the pathway of destruction or the pathway to eternal life, Matt. 7:13-14.
- D. Personal sin multiplied together with the sins of many constitute national sin.
1. Barnes pictured Judah facing “a great national calamity,” physical owing to the widespread spiritual calamity of sin.
  2. “Idolatry and apostasy are the modern way; the worship of God the old way” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

### **III. What can we glean from Jeremiah 6:16 for application to our generation and to ourselves personally?**

- A. The “old paths” to which mankind today must direct his attention must be distinguished simply from human ways of doing things, even if they are old also.
1. God’s “old paths” are older than any of man’s “paths” and divine in origin rather than of human origin.
  2. The “old paths” of sin must be noted and avoided, Job 22:15.
  3. “Old paths” are not suitable if they do not originate with God, i.e. hand-me-down religion from one’s forefathers is not to be preferred over God-authored religion.
- B. The precept of walking in the pathway of God is prominent also in the New Testament.
1. We must “walk in the newness of life,” Rom. 6:4.
  2. We must “walk honestly,” Rom. 13:13; 1 Thess. 4:12.
  3. We must “walk by faith,” 2 Cor. 5:7.

4. We must “walk worthy of the [Christian] vocation [“calling”],” Eph. 4:1.
5. We must “walk in love,” Eph. 5:2.
6. We must “walk as children of light,” Eph. 5:8.
7. We must “walk worthy of the Lord,” Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12.
8. We must walk in Christ, Col. 2:6.
9. We must walk in wisdom,” Col. 4:5.
10. We must walk after the commandments of Jesus, 2 John 6.
11. We must walk in truth, 3 John 4.

**Conclusion:**

1. God through the prophet Jeremiah lamented that his people, Judah, had turned from him to walk in other paths, Jer. 18:15.
2. Rather, God’s people in every age ought to follow the praiseworthy examples of those who walk in God’s paths, Heb. 6:12; 1 Cor. 11:1.
3. Especially in the church of our Lord, we are to “walk in the light of the LORD,” Isa. 2:5; 1 John 1:7.

**Invitation:**

1. The Christian walk begins with conversion, Rom. 6:3-4.
2. The Christian walk continues as a walk of faith, 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17; 1 John 1:9.

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# The Way of Man Is Not in Himself

## Jeremiah 10:23

**Thesis:** To demonstrate the necessity of man's reliance on God to navigate this life and prepare for eternity.

**Song:** *The Way of the Cross Leads Home*

### **Introduction:**

1. Man must turn to Almighty God for the appropriate roadmap through this life, Psa. 17:5; Prov. 3:5-6.
2. Righteous souls happily turn to God for divine direction, Psa. 37:23.
3. There is a direct correlation between keeping the "statutes" or "Word" of God and having hope in this life and toward eternity, Psa. 119:116-117.
4. Man must turn to his Maker to correctly understand his purpose in this life and in eternity, Prov. 20:24.

### **Body:**

#### **I. The nation of Judah had severed itself from God by its constant and sustained rebellion.**

- A. Judah rejected the Word of God through his faithful prophets, but nevertheless claimed a continued association with God.
  1. Judah not only rejected God's Word spoken by the prophets of God, but mistreated and killed God's prophets, Jer. 20:1-2; 26:8, 20-23; 38:4-6.
  2. The people of God in the nation of Judah at every level or station corrupted themselves before God, Jer. 5:31; 23:11; 32:32.
  3. Adultery, lying and approving of the sins of others was commonplace, Jer. 23:14.
  4. Idolatry was widely practiced while still paying nominal lip service to Jehovah, Jer. 2:23; 9:14; 48:7.
- B. Almighty God refused to be a token God to the rebellious nation of Judah.
  1. Therefore, God determined to allow a foreign nation to

- capture Jerusalem and defeat Judah, Jer. 20:4-6; 21:2-10.
- 2. The prophet Jeremiah explicitly proclaimed that Israelites would be captives in Babylon for 70 years, Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10.
- 3. God spoke through the prophet about the certainty of Jerusalem's destruction as well as the specific reasons for which God determined to have the city destroyed, Jer. 32:28-36.
- 4. The captivity of which Jeremiah prophesied lasted from 606 B.C. to 536 B.C. when the Persians, new rulers of the Fertile Crescent, set captive peoples free.
- 5. The city of Jerusalem was thoroughly destroyed in 587 B.C.

## **II. God through the prophet Jeremiah called Judah to turn to God for physical and spiritual salvation.**

- A. The prophet Jeremiah exclaimed in Jer. 10:23 the hopelessness of mankind's attempt to rely solely on himself (excluding God from directing his life).
  - 1. "Men are always looking for shortcuts, or half-measures, for something easier or more convenient" (Bench 358).
  - 2. Rather than relying upon himself, to be saved, man must rely on the grace and mercy of God, Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.
  - 3. We, like Saul of Tarsus, sin when we rely on our own ingenuity to serve God, Acts 26:9-10.
- B. The state of the nation of Judah was that of a country in crisis from within and from without.
  - 1. "At the rumour of the enemy's approach Jeremiah utters in the name of the nation a supplication appropriate to men overtaken by the divine justice" (Barnes).
  - 2. "The prophet here acknowledges the sovereignty and dominion of the divine Providence, that by it, and not by their own will and wisdom, the affairs both of nations and particular persons are directed and determined, v. 23" (Henry).
  - 3. Judah was a ruined nation morally.
  - 4. Judah was a ruined nation religiously or spiritually.

5. Judah was a ruined nation politically with leaders who were ineffective toward the nation internally as well as externally respecting other nations.
6. God allowed the Babylonians to overrun Judah and destroy Jerusalem, taking survivors as slaves to Babylon.

### III. Let's look at Jer. 10:23 more carefully.

- A. The words "I know" of Jer. 10:23 come from the Hebrew word *yada*, which "[e]ssentially...means: (1) to know by observing and reflecting (thinking), and (2) to know by experiencing" (Vine).
  1. The word "know" here is sometimes translated "acknowledge" and "comprehend."
  2. Jeremiah exclaimed that it was obvious that mankind is ill-equipped to guide himself through life toward eternity, and he acknowledged or noted that he comprehended that fact.
- B. The word "way" in Jer. 10:23 is used figuratively and means "a course of life" (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. Everyone follows "a course of life," one way or another, planned or haphazardly.
  2. If planned, on whom ought mankind to rely for charting the course of his life?
- C. In English, the word "man" appears twice in this verse, but from different Hebrew words.
  1. The first occurrence of the word "man" in Jer. 10:23 is *adam* and refers to "a human being" (*Biblesoft's*), i.e. mankind.
  2. The second occurrence of the word "man" is from a word meaning "a male person" (*Biblesoft's*).
  3. The instruction by which mankind ought to direct itself is not subject to determination by human, male leadership (and if not by male leadership, then not by female leadership, 1 Cor. 14:34).
  4. Only divine instruction will do for directing humanity.
- D. "Walketh" is used throughout the Bible to represent one's manner of life or conduct.
  1. Though man is responsible for his conduct, what is acceptable conduct is determined solely by God.
  2. Today, we must walk in the light of the New

Testament, 1 John 1:7.

- E. The words “to direct,” of course, have to do with guiding one’s conduct.
  - 1. Only God has the prerogative of directing mankind between right and wrong, Psa. 119:133.
  - 2. God alone is willing and able to instruct man in his goings, Psa. 32:8.
- F. “Steps” means “a pace or regular step” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  - 1. God looks out for the righteous, Psa. 85:13.
  - 2. For us, Jesus Christ, directs our steps, 1 Pet. 2:21.

**IV. What can we learn from Jer. 10:23 that we can and ought to apply to ourselves today?**

- A. As long as mankind fails to acknowledge or comprehend that he is ill-equipped to direct himself through this life toward eternity, his ways will continue to be diverse and perverse.
  - 1. Man’s ungodliness will only continue to increase, 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:13.
  - 2. No wonder mankind through his own genius imagines that he is a descendant of monkeys, i.e. subscribes to evolution instead of creation.

If a man fails to acknowledge his relationship to God, fails to submit to divine direction, he denies the fundamental reason for his existence. One who walks the path of life is not able to give moral and spiritual guidance to his own steps. He will inevitably stray from the straight and narrow (v. 23) . He therefore requires divine discipline and correction. (Smith 268)

This is one of the most profound statements in the Scriptures and one that needs continually to be heeded by sinful men. As long as men seek to be guided by their own counsels, and by what seems good to them, they are destined to frustration and defeat. (Coffman)

- 3. Solomon made an astute assessment of self-governance in Prov. 14:12; 16:25.
- B. Every thoughtful and wise person accepts the fact that he must appeal to a common authority above himself.
  - 1. “He [Jeremiah] recognized, as all thinking men eventually must, that man must be able to appeal to an authority higher than himself. He must have an

- absolute and objective standard. That standard is Holy Scripture!” (Shelly 33-34).
2. There is no possibility of unity, for instance, without an across the board appeal to the higher authority of God’s Word, Eph. 4:13.
  3. If Jer. 10:23 is so, and it is, one cannot allow his conscience to be his guide, but the Word of God is the perfect guide through this life and toward eternity, Prov. 28:26.
  4. Morality also must be based on an objective standard of conduct that God himself determines: “When man determines for himself (based on Satan’s work) what morality is, he soon loses (sic) moral consciousness” (Box 796).
- C. Calling disregard for God’s Word by new names does not change the nature of rebellion against God or its consequences.
1. “There are many problems facing the church today, but none more serious than values clarification which teaches the child to direct his own steps” (Ward 7).
  2. So-called situation ethics also denies that there is a single standard of right and wrong, and that right and wrong depends on the present circumstance and the subjective evaluation of the individual, 1 Cor. 1:18.
  3. The same attitude anciently resulted in hundreds of years of spiritual conflict with God and national crisis during the Bible period of Judges, Judg. 17:6; 21:25.
  4. Godless humanism, where man supposes that he is the center of his own universe, directly conflicts both with Holy Scripture and man’s innate propensity to worship somebody or something higher than himself.

Man is incurably religious. He is born with a feeling of helplessness and spends his life seeking a Helper. Jeremiah expressed the need in these words, “I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Sociologists at Yale University made a study of some 300 societies, primitive and highly developed, to determine common elements in all cultures. Each culture had some form of worship. When men are ignorant of God’s directions

for worship, they grope in darkness trying to find some way to placate the wrath of an angry God. Men in ignorance tend to worship what they fear. Instinctively, they feel the need to sacrifice their best. In many heathen cultures, parents have even sacrificed their own children. (Brannan 11)

5. Liberal theology even among members of the Lord's church that holds, for instance, that rather than being authoritative the New Testament is a collection of love letters from God is subjective to the point of disregarding divine instruction and man purporting to direct his own steps.
6. Denominationalism where man proposes to choose his own terms for redemption, worshipping Almighty God, Christian living and Christian service is so much like the nation of Judah that Jeremiah decried, outwardly purporting to be God's people but rejecting God in favor of their own devices, Rom. 10:1-3.

This principle [Jer. 10:23] is as true today as it was then. To contemplate that man can name his own terms of admission into the glories of heaven is incongruous (sic), yet, as we consider the religious of our days, myriads of doctrines are propagated under the umbrella of "Christendom." But Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13). (Whitten 18)

Many people have turned to their own standards, standards that will deceive and cause men to be lost. Some men rely on their own feelings as a standard. The "joy they feel in their hearts" is thought to be evidence of God's accepting them, but those persons who rely on their feelings will be sadly disappointed when they face the judgment. (Halliburton 1171)

### **Conclusion:**

1. Had the nation of Judah truly loved God, its people would have kept God's commandments, John 14:15, ASV.
2. Especially God's people must be careful not only to avoid

supposing that they are a sufficient guide to themselves for this life and toward eternity, the children of God must avoid close relationships with worldly people who are guides to themselves without consideration of God, Psa. 1:1.

3. It is not possible for mankind to direct his own steps in a way that is pleasing to God when not even our thoughts are harmonious with the thoughts of God, Isa. 55:8-9.
4. Knowledge of the way that leads to eternal life is only discernible within God's Word, the Bible, Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; John 14:6.
5. It is reasonable for mankind to seek reliable information as to how to arrive in heaven someday.

Being aware of this [Jer. 10:23], he would not be ashamed to ask for help. (A man starting on a trip to an unknown destination does not feel ashamed to ask for aids to help him on his way.) He doesn't want to wander and waste time and energy. Surely one would not think he could make it from earth to heaven on his own. (Clark 93)

6. It is reasonable to want more than a subjective, uncertain encounter with God in this life that offers nothing but uncertainty regarding interaction with God in the next life.

### **Invitation:**

1. The only way that a man or a woman can conduct himself or herself in such a way as to please God is to fill his or her heart with the Word of God (for us the New Testament), Psa. 119:11.
2. The New Testament or Gospel instructs the penitent to be baptized for the remission of sins (without quibbling), Acts 2:38.
3. The Gospel also instructs the erring child of God to repent and pray for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 8:22.

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# A Vessel Made of Clay

## Jeremiah 18:1-12; Isaiah 64:8

**Thesis:** Exposition of Jer. 18:1-12 and application of principles to our generation.

**Song:** *Have Thine Own Way, Lord*

### **Introduction:**

1. Forty years after the Exodus from Egyptian slavery, the Israelites crossed from the east side of the Jordan River into Canaan in about 1451 B.C.
2. Joshua led that people in the conquest and occupation of Canaan.
3. After the death of Joshua, judges over the next 450 years (Acts 13:20) periodically led Israel against its oppressors.
4. Israel became like the nations around it with the selection of its first king, Saul, in 1095 B.C., 1 Sam. 8:5.
5. After King Saul followed kings David and Solomon, each of these three reigning for 40 years.
6. However, the kingdom split in 975 B.C. in the northern kingdom of Israel, comprised of ten tribes, and the southern kingdom of Judah.
7. God allowed the nation of Assyria to defeat and deport the prominent survivors of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C.
8. The text we consider today, Jer. 18:1-12, constitutes a warning from God that he will likewise permit a foreign nation, Babylon, to defeat and deport survivors of Judah and Jerusalem, unless individual Jews collectively as the nation of Judah repent and serve God once more wholeheartedly.
9. This warning by God through Jeremiah graphically declares the ongoing providence of God in the workings of nations toward each other, and that God will punish nations whose citizens are ungodly.
10. Therefore, in principle, the warning of God through the prophet Jeremiah is applicable to individuals and nations today, including each of us and our country, the USA.

### **Body:**

#### **I. First, an exposition of the text of Jer. 18:1-12 is in order.**

- A. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying," v. 1.

1. This and countless other occurrences of similar expressions throughout the Bible indicate the divine origin of the Scriptures, 1 Kings 17:2.
  2. The apostle Peter summarized the manner of revelation from God to mankind anciently, 2 Pet. 1:21; cf. Hos. 12:10.
- B. “Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words,” v. 2.
1. Craftsmen often worked out of their homes, and craftsmen of the same type of occupation usually resided and worked in the same sections of a city; “Probably located in the potter’s quarter in the southern section of the city, near the Potsherd Gate and the Valley of the Son of Hinnom” (*Wycliffe*).
  2. God used a similar illustration with the prophet Isaiah, Isa. 29:16; 45:9; 64:8.
  3. God used this same illustration through the apostle Paul, Rom. 9:21.
  4. Job also pictures creation of mankind as God molding clay, Job 10:9; 33:6.
- C. Jeremiah observed a potter using a potter’s wheel to make a clay vessel, vv. 3-4.
1. If we haven’t experienced it ourselves, probably all of us have seen a potter’s wheel and a potter working with his or her hands to mold a vase out of wet clay.
  2. “The potter’s wheel in the present day seems to differ very little from that which was in use between two and three thousand years ago” (Clarke).
  3. Barnes notes that the original words mean “literally, ‘the two wheels.’ The lower one was worked by the feet to give motion to the upper one, which was a flat disc or plate of wood, on which the potter laid the clay, and moulded it with his fingers as it revolved rapidly.”
  4. The illustration in Jer. 18:4 notes that when the form of the wet clay on the potter’s wheel doesn’t meet with the potter’s expectations, the wet clay is reformed.
  5. The clay item under consideration was “marred” or ruined.
  6. “The narrative does not reveal the cause of the ruination of the original vessel. This is not the point.

The major lesson here is that the potter can do with the clay as he pleases” (Smith 358).

- D. God declares to Jeremiah that Almighty God has power over humanity and the nations of mankind similarly as a potter has control over soft clay, vv. 5-6.
1. Matthew Henry refers to this passage by the title: “The Sovereign Prerogative of God.”
  2. No passage speaks more clearly about God’s unseen providence behind the scenes in the working of nations.
  3. “This unlimited power of God over mankind is exercised according to man’s conduct, not according to a ...unchangeable determination” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  4. Clarke verbalizes it: “Have I not a right to do with a people whom I have created as reason and justice may require? If they do not answer my intentions, may I not reject and destroy them; and act as this potter, make a new vessel out of that which at first did not succeed in his hands?”
  5. Albert Barnes has an intriguing observation regarding the illustration here to include God’s long range plan for human redemption.

When a vessel was ruined, the potter did not throw it away, but crushed it together, dashed it back upon the wheel, and began his work afresh, until the clay had taken the predetermined shape. It was God’s purpose that Judaea should become the proper scene for the manifestation of the Messiah, and her sons be fit to receive the Saviour’s teaching and carry the good tidings to all lands. If therefore at any stage of the preparation the Jewish nation took such a course as would have frustrated this purpose of Providence, it was crushed by affliction into an unresisting mass, in which the formative process began again immediately.

6. Part of the problem with the Jews of Jeremiah’s day as well as in Jesus’ day was their mistaken belief that because they were once God’s chosen people that they would always be God’s people, irrespective of whether they obeyed him, Matt. 3:8-9.

...refuting the Jews' reliance on their external privileges as God's elect people, as if God could never cast them off. But if the potter, a mere creature, has power to throw away a marred vessel, and raise up other clay from the ground, a fortiori [a strong, logical argument], God, the Creator, can cast away the people who prove unfaithful to His election, and can raise others in their stead (cf. Isa 45:9; 64:8; Rom 9:20-21). (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

7. As with parables and all figurative illustrations in the Bible, caution must be exercised not to allegorize every detail beyond the reason for which the illustration was introduced, Luke 18:1-8.

A word of caution is in order on this passage. Analogies when pressed beyond their intended purpose yield bad theology. One should not conclude from this episode that in God's dealing with Israel He has been at fault in the ruination of the vessel. The potter which Jeremiah watched may have made an error of judgment in the amount of clay he selected or in some other respect that caused the first vessel to be inadequate. But no one should attribute such errors of judgment to the master Potter. The analogy breaks down in another respect. Clay is inanimate and material. The human heart possesses the power to willfully rebel against the Potter. Man can choose to be pliable in the hands of the Creator or to be as hard as sun-baked clay. Every child of God should be praying: "Have Thine own way Lord, Have thine own way. Thou are the potter, I am the clay." (Smith 359)

- E. God affirms that he has the ability and willpower to purpose to destroy nations because of they are marred with sin, or to refrain from destroying them if they turn from their sins, vv. 7-8.
  1. God's purpose toward a nation can change quickly based on the conduct of its citizens; the word "instant" means "a wink (of the eyes), i.e. a very short space of time" (*Biblesoft's*).
  2. Sinfulness of individuals collectively as a nation

prompts God to work through his providence against such a nation.

3. However, the severity of God through his providence toward a nation is conditional so that when a nation and its citizens turn to God penitently and revere him, God will turn from his purpose to destroy it.
4. We shudder at the thought of the denominational doctrine of Calvinism, summarized in the acrostic, TULIP, and note that clearly Jer. 18:7-10 forever substantiates the freewill of humanity and that God's treatment of mankind is based on the good and bad choices men make.

We consider this little paragraph to be one of the most important in the entire Bible. All such erroneous theological nostrums as beings "saved by faith only," or "once saved, always saved," "the irrevocable promises of God." or "Palestine belongs to racial Jews forever" are eternally refuted and cancelled by what is declared in this little paragraph. (Coffman)

5. Barnes correctly asserts that God deals with mankind conditionally, and that man is in control of his own eternal destiny: "All God's dealings with mankind are here declared to be conditional. God changeth not, all depends upon man's conduct."
  6. *Wycliffe* continues: "Even Jeremiah's sternest declaration of doom, like Jonah's (Jonah 3:4), presupposes an opportunity to repent."
  7. Smith adds: "A most important principle of Biblical interpretation emerges in verses 7-10. Simply stated the principle is this: Neither God's threats nor His promises are unconditional. The attitude of God toward any people depends entirely upon their response to Him" (359).
  8. Routinely in Scripture, God urges repentance and promises favor instead of retribution for disobedience, Ezek. 18:21; 33:11; Jer. 26:3; Jonah 3:10.
- F. God further pronounces the ability and willpower to purpose to build up a nation that reveres him, or to overthrow a nation if turns instead to sin, vv. 9-10.
1. The reverence of individuals for God and hence the

nation comprised of those individuals enjoys the favorable providence of God.

2. However, the goodness of God through his providence toward a nation is conditional upon the citizens of that nation and collectively that nation continuing to revere God.
- G. Therefore, God instructed Jeremiah to tell the nation of Judah of God's intention to destroy it because of its sins, but that he would refrain from destroying it if the nation repented and returned to God, v. 11.
1. The word "frame" is a verb form of the noun in Hebrew translated "potter" (Barnes).
  2. The reaction of God toward either human obedience or disobedience of divine instruction is predictable.
  3. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, gave the nation of Judah one last chance to repent with Babylon on the very doorstep of Judah's destruction.

The emblematical interpretation of the potter with the clay lays a foundation for the prophecy that follows, vv. 11-17, in which the people are told that it is only by reason of their stiffnecked persistency in wickedness that they render threatened judgment certain, whereas by return to their God they might prevent the ruin of the kingdom. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

4. Essentially, God advised Judah as he has routinely advised humanity to 'repent or else,' 2 Kings 17:13; Rev. 2-3.
  5. The word "return" means to "retreat," in this case from sin to the side of Jehovah (*Biblesoft's*).
- H. However, the nation of Judah spurned the overture of God to spare the judgment of destruction against it and its capital city of Jerusalem, v. 12.
1. The nation of Judah determined its own destiny of destruction and deportation by obstinately refusing to turn from its sinfulness and revere God.

The mood here is not one of despondency but one of defiance. The leaders are warning the prophet that it is useless for him to continue trying to convert them. They are saying in verse 12, "We have chosen our path and

we will continue to walk in it regardless of what you say the consequences will be.” (Smith 361)

2. Had Judah repented, God would have spared the nation, Jer. 7:3; 35:15; 2 Chron. 7:14.
3. “By this answer the prophet makes them condemn themselves out of their own mouth; cf. Isa 28:15; 30:10 f” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
4. God allowed Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and bring about the defeat of Judah in 587 B.C., Jer. 45:4.

Why will men deliberately reject God’s call to repentance? The obvious answer lies in their unwillingness to be restrained in any manner. They will live free lives, they say; but, like the prodigal son of the parable, they will inevitably find that there are restraints also in that evil world they have chosen, where some evil master will assign them their portion in the swine pens of this world. How free are they? (Coffman)

## II. Second, what application should we make today from the principles within the text of Jer. 18:1-12?

- A. There are individual applications of the principles from Jer. 18:1-12 that each of us ought to make in our lives.
  1. Like Judah ought to have, we need to hearken to the inspired Word of God, 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:11.
  2. We, God’s creation essentially out of clay, are clay in the hands of God, but by our choices vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor, Ecc. 12:7; Rom. 9:20-21; Rev. 22:17.
  3. “Whosoever” passages indicate that salvation or eternal ruin are ultimately choices made by individual souls, Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:13; 2 John 9; Rev. 20:15.
  4. God’s providence is still active in the lives of men, and God will act favorably toward his followers and adversely against sinners, Rom. 8:28.
  5. God means for Christians today to be the good, clay vessel.
  6. However, even Christians need to be careful not to take their salvation for granted, as though the

continuation of God's blessings is not conditional upon continued obedience.

- B. Obviously, also there are applications of the principles from Jer. 18:1-12 that our nation (and other nations) need to make so that the providence of God does not work against it.
1. God's providential favor seemingly extended toward the western world in general and the United States of America specifically can quickly change to providential disfavor because of sinfulness.
  2. Sinfulness for which God punishes nations has to do with the sins of a nation's citizens and collectively as a nation.
  3. The United States over recent decades through its citizens has mired itself in moral waywardness, e.g. homosexuality, fornication, adultery, abortion, etc.
  4. As a nation, the United States has become a wayward nation by attempting to expunge all references to God from public forum, e.g. schools, public property, pledge of allegiance, money, etc.
  5. The removal of God from the classroom and other public forums has already ripened a crop of physical consequences, e.g. shootings, etc.
  6. Our nation has erred in the forced doctrine of evolution as well as the election of hedonism, humanism and materialism.
  7. There are spiritual consequences to sins for individuals and there may be grievous physical consequences, too, toward our beloved nation.
  8. God's providence will not continue to uphold a nation that despises him!
  9. However, if our nation, including the citizens that comprise it, retreat from sin toward God, we and our nation can be spared.
  10. If we persist in personal and national waywardness from God, neither the United States nor its citizens will be able to withstand the unfavorable providence of God against us.
  11. We must not suppose that because we have enjoyed the good providence of God that we will always enjoy divine providence, though we make ourselves and our

nation vile to God.

### **Conclusion:**

1. “Jehovah, the Potter of nations, is sovereign in his work, yet his is a sovereignty that is responsive to the wills of his creatures” (*Wycliffe*).
2. Unfortunately, the nation of Judah did not heed the warning of God through the prophet Jeremiah, and God allowed Babylon to defeat and deport survivors of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.
3. God intends people living in the New Testament era, including today, to learn by the mistakes of those who have gone before, 1 Cor. 10:1-12.
4. God also intends people living in the New Testament era, including today, to learn by the successes of those who have gone before, Heb. 11:1-12:1.

### **Invitation:**

1. As clay in the Maker’s hands, he will make us into a useful vessel or into a vessel fit for nothing, depending upon the choices that we make, namely obedience or disobedience, Heb. 5:9; Rom. 6:17; 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8.
2. If Jesus’ words mean anything to you, you will complete your faith by being baptized into Jesus Christ, Mark 16:16; Gal. 3:27.
3. If Jesus Christ is precious to you, then you will be faithful throughout your life, repenting and praying when you have faltered in sin, Rev. 2:10; Acts 8:22.

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# A New Covenant

## Jeremiah 31:31-34

**Thesis:** Exposition of Jer. 31:31-34 and to glean information respecting the covenant of God under which we live today.

**Song:** *The Gospel Is for All*

### Introduction:

1. God has always had a plan for the redemption of humanity, Eph. 3:3-11; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20.
2. It is obvious from Scripture that Judaism was never intended to be God's final revelation or covenant with humanity, Rom. 7:6-7; 2 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14

In short, it [the New Covenant] was designed to replace the entire religious system of the Jews, including the Decalogue, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the tabernacle ritual, the temple, and the temple services later developed, the statutes, judgments, and commandments, embracing the entire ceremonial and moral constitution of Judaism. Every student needs to identify which covenant was annulled and replaced by the new. (Coffman)

3. The text of Jer. 31:31-34 foretells of another covenant after Judaism between God and humanity, which the writer of the Book of Hebrews confirms is the New Testament, Heb. 8:6-13.
4. *Wycliffe* records: "The concept of the new covenant is Jeremiah's most important contribution to Biblical thought."

### Body:

#### I. Let's look at Jer. 31:31-34 more carefully.

- A. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah," Jer 31:31.
  1. "The covenant which the Lord will make with all Israel in the future is called 'a new covenant,' as compared with that made with the fathers at Sinai, when the people were led out of Egypt; this latter is thus implicitly called the 'old covenant.'" (*Keil &*

*Delitzsch*).

2. God appended the covenant made at Mt. Sinai with more than simply the Ten Commandments, Deut. 29:1.
3. Adam Clarke simply identifies the New Covenant as “[t]he Christian dispensation.”
4. When Jeremiah wrote his prophecy, the Israelites had long since divided into two nations, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, so that reference to “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” was used to include all Israelites in the expression.
5. In fulfillment, though, the reference was to the new “Israel of God,” the church, Gal. 6:16.
6. The new “Israel of God” is comprised of people from all races, nations, stations in life and genders, Gal. 3:28.

In the New Covenant all special considerations and privileges of racial Israel were forever lost. Race, today, is totally unimportant, as regards salvation. No person whomsoever can be either saved or lost eternally, upon the basis of any racial consideration whatsoever. (Coffman)

- B. “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD,” Jer 31:32.
1. The very nature of Judaism had no provision built therein for violation of it; Coffman astutely remarks:

The significance of this is beyond all calculation. Israel did not merely strain the covenant, they broke it! Furthermore, there were not any of the promises of that covenant which were designed to be valid unless Israel refrained from breaking the covenant.

2. God compared the covenant relationship between himself and Israel to that of a marriage, cf. Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:7-8.
  3. The Israelites were guilty of “spiritual adultery” (Henry).
- C. “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put

my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people,” Jer 31:33.

1. The New Covenant prophesied here contrasts with the covenant written initially on tables of stone (Judaism, beginning with the Ten Commandments), Exod. 31:18; Deut. 4:13; 9:11; 10:4.
  2. The apostle Paul contrasted Judaism and Christianity by contrasting the “tables of stone” with “the fleshly tables of the heart,” 2 Cor. 3:3.
  3. *Keil & Delitzsch* write that “the difference between the two consists merely in this, that the will of God as expressed in the law under the old covenant was presented externally to the people, while under the new covenant it is to become an internal principle of life.”
- D. “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,” Jer 31:34.
1. The first half of verse 34 distinguishes between who, how and when souls became members of the Old Covenant versus souls becoming members of the New Covenant.

Infants and small children were members of the old covenant Israel; but this would no longer be true under the new covenant. Every member of the new covenant Israel will know God. The word “know” in Hebrew has the connotation of knowledge derived from personal experience. (Smith)

2. Coffman quotes George DeHoff:

Under the new covenant of Christ men are taught before they become Christians. Then they obey the gospel. Under the old covenant a child was a Jew as soon as he was born and had to be taught this fact after he was old enough to understand.

3. Rather than receiving their religion merely by inheritance as under the Old Covenant, under the New Covenant, religion was to be personally embraced on the front end of the covenant relationship; we will

- comment more about this shortly.
4. Forgiveness of sin is the mission of the New Covenant, and that materially differs from the purpose of the Old Covenant.
  5. The key contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament is expressed well by *Keil & Delitzsch*: “...it [the Old Covenant] can only awaken him [mankind] to the perception of sin, but cannot blot it out.”
  6. There was always a remembrance of sins not forgiven under the Old Covenant, but not so under the New Covenant, Heb. 10:1-4.

## **II. What does Scripture have to say about this New Covenant.**

- A. The New Covenant is the New Testament, validated not with the blood of animals but the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
  1. This was Paul’s message to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 11:25.
  2. We commemorate the blood of Jesus Christ for the New Testament in the weekly communion, Luke 22:20; Acts 20:7.
- B. The New Covenant is the tool by which sins are actually forgiven.
  1. The writer of Hebrews mentions the Jer. 31:31-34 prophecy not only in Heb. 8:6-13 but also in Heb. 10:16-19.
  2. Only through the implementation of the New Covenant can the child of God have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,” Heb. 10:19.
  3. Whereas the Old Covenant, not having a provision for saving sinful humanity, only condemned, the New Covenant offers spiritual life, 2 Cor. 3:6-11.
  4. “The forgiveness of sins is the grand hallmark of the New Covenant. Never before in the history of mankind was there anything like it” (Coffman).
- C. There is a fundamental difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant regarding how one becomes a member of the respective covenants.
  1. The part of Jer. 31:34 that reads “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his

brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” pertains to the differing manners of becoming a member of either covenant.

2. Under Judaism, children were born into the covenant, not choosing for themselves to become covenant members.
3. Under Judaism, Jews became members of the covenant by birth and were afterward taught the covenant.
4. However, under Christianity, rather than being born into the New Covenant by physical birth, souls are taught the New Testament or Gospel after which they voluntarily bind themselves by the New Covenant through the new birth, John 6:45; 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:23.
5. James E. Smith writes:

Heretofore the laws of God had been written on tablets of stone; now they are to be written on the heart. Under the new covenant men will respond to the divine will from inward motivation rather than outward compulsion. Every individual born in Israel was automatically under the law of God; he had no choice in the matter. But one can enter into the new covenant Israel, the church of Christ, only by willingly submitting himself to the commandments of God.

6. Consequently, there is no infant membership in the Lord’s church because one must be old enough and informed enough to voluntarily choose to embrace the New Covenant, Mark 16:16.

### **Conclusion:**

1. The prophecy of Jer. 31:31-34 is a reference to the New Testament, so indicated at length in Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:16-19, but also “...Paul refers this prophecy in an abridged form (Rom 11:27) (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
2. The difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament speaks to the difference in mankind’s approach to God under either covenant, Exod. 20:19; Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12 (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
3. The object of God in either testament or covenant has always been the same, “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God,” Jer 32:38.
4. Aside from the forgiveness of sins afforded under the New

Covenant, God's laws are more effective in humankind through voluntary adoption than simply by inheritance.

**Invitation:**

1. Won't you voluntarily select Jesus Christ as your Savior while opportunity remains?
2. Absolute forgiveness of past sins is available exclusively through coming to Jesus on his terms, Matt. 11:28-30; Mark 16:16.
3. Forgiveness of sins committed by Christians is also available under the New Covenant, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# Let Us Examine Our Ways and Turn Back to the Lord

## Lamentations 3:40 NKJV

**Thesis:** To encourage introspection and spiritual revival.

**Song:** *Revive Us Again*

### Introduction:

1. Periodic or routine introspection is key to being in a right relationship with the God of the universe, Lam. 3:40; Hag. 1:5, 7; 2 Cor. 13:5.
2. Self-criticism, using God's infallible Word as the tool with which we inspect ourselves, precedes any needed course corrections.
3. We must couple biblical introspection with a determination to bring ourselves in perpetual alignment with the divine will of Jehovah.

### Body:

#### I. Let's look more closely at Lamentations 3:40.

- A. "Let us search out and examine our ways."
  1. "Try" (KJV) or "examine" (NKJV) means "to penetrate; hence, to examine intimately" (*Biblesoft's*).
  2. "Ways" means "a course of life" (*Biblesoft's*).
  3. *Wycliffe* calls the procedure outlined in this portion of the verse as "heart-searching."
  4. This searching can only be accomplished with the aid of God through his revealed Word, Psa. 139:23-24.
  5. Every child of God needs to compare his course of life with the way in which God would have him live his life, in every aspect thereof.
- B. "And turn back to the LORD."
  1. The word "LORD" in all capital letters refers to Jehovah, "(the) self-Existent or Eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God" (*Biblesoft's*).
  2. Barnes says of this portion of the verse and turning back to Jehovah, "the Hebrew implies not half way, but the whole."
  3. Clearly, the object of self-examination is to bring

oneself in closer harmony with the will of God, and thereby to draw nigh to God himself, Psa. 119:59.

4. God has always been willing to pardon the offenses of the penitent, Isa. 55:7; Zech. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:9.
  5. It is not only important to go through the motions of being a child of God, but we must actually comply with divine instruction outwardly and inwardly, which inward devotion will us manifest outward compliance, Isa. 1:11-15.
- C. The self-examination has as its purpose in change for the better, a reformation brought about by repentance.

Repentance begins with self-examination and honest analysis of their situation. Every individual must “search” (lit., dig into) and “examine” (lit., test or try) his heart. The objective of this rigorous self-examination is to discover and remove any impediments which may be preventing them from returning to the Lord. The Hebrew preposition translated “to” has the idea of actually arriving at the goal. The poet is urging upon his hearers a complete and whole-hearted return to God. (Smith)

## II. What principles might we derive from Lamentations 3:40 that we can apply to ourselves today?

- A. Jehovah throughout Scripture repeatedly calls upon mankind to devote himself to discerning the revealed will of God, Acts 3:19 ASV.
1. The apostle Paul called upon Christians to inspect their works for biblical soundness, Gal. 6:4.
  2. We must make biblical course corrections in our lives when our hearts or consciences (educated by the Word of God) convict us, knowing the judgment of God is terminal toward the ungodly, 1 John 3:20-21.
  3. The consequence of **not** inspecting our own hearts and subsequent conduct is the harsh inspection of God, if not before, certainly in Final Judgment, 1 Cor. 11:31.
  4. We must repent (when needed) or else, Rev. 2:5!
  5. Even the most previously useful Christians can lose their way and be lost, 1 Cor. 9:27.
- B. New Testament Scripture calls upon Christians to perform introspection before communing with Jesus Christ in the

Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11:28.

1. In the passage where 1 Cor. 11:28 appears, the instruction pertains to observing the communion in a worthy manner, i.e. for spiritual purposes rather than to gratify one's hunger.
  2. Of course, one may also partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner if his mind is not centered on the sacrifice of Jesus that the communion represents, i.e. being distracted by sundry unrelated thoughts or just inattention to worship.
- C. The areas are many in one's life where we should examine our ways and when needed turn back to the Lord.
1. Every aspect of **Christian worship** needs to be strictly in accordance with what is proscribed (for us) in the New Testament, Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:23; John 4:24.
  2. Every aspect of **Christian service** needs to correspond to what is written in the New Testament, Titus 2:14; Jam. 1:27; 2:14-26.
  3. Every aspect of **Christian living** needs to be in harmony with what the Gospel of Christ teaches, Titus 2:12; Phil. 4:8.
  4. Every aspect of **Christian teaching** needs to correspond exactly to what is taught upon the pages of the New Testament, 1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:16; Rom. 16:17-18.
  5. The whole of our Christianity needs to be whole-hearted submission to Almighty God, Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:8; Matt. 22:37.

### **Conclusion:**

1. The nation of Judah, like the northern tribes (the nation of Israel) before them, spurned the longsuffering, grace and mercy of God until God destroyed the nation.
2. Will we search and try our ways, or will we wait until it's too late to make course corrections, i.e. when Jehovah in Final Judgment passes eternal sentence on us?
3. Will we turn to God at every opportunity, guided by his infallible Word, or will we exhibit little to no concern for our soul's salvation?

### **Invitation:**

1. Turning to the Lord is a prerequisite to initial salvation and

continued salvation, Acts 26:20.

2. Turning to the Lord initially includes repentance, Acts 2:38.
3. Christians also need to repent of sins in their lives, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.
4. Please search and try your ways and turn to the Lord today.

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# Wayward Children

## Isaiah 1:2-4 NKJV

**Thesis:** To examine the divine illustration in Isa. 1:2-4 and apply its principles to God's children today.

**Song:** *Hallelujah Praise Jehovah*

### **Introduction:**

1. Isaiah was a prophet of God to the nation of Judah.
2. Like always in the history of humanity, the children of God strayed from divine instruction.
3. Like always, God patiently called his people back to himself through the agency of inspired prophets.
4. Like always, the children of God largely ignored the pleas of a benevolent God, causing God subsequently to send chastisements to encourage restoration of faithfulness.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's look more carefully at our text of Isa. 1:2-4.**

- A. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken," Isa 1:2a NKJV.
  1. Reference to heavens and earth is a poetical style that personifies the totality of God's creation to arrest the attention of humanity to the message of God, Deut. 30:19; 32:1 (Clarke).
  2. Matthew Henry notes that the lifeless universe will more nearly listen to and obey the God of the universe than rebellious Israel (or mankind generally): "Sooner will the inanimate creatures hear, who observe the law and answer the end of their creation, than this stupid senseless people."
  3. The word "hear" means "to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience..." (*Biblesoft's*).
  4. The words "give ear" mean "to broaden out the ear (with the hand), i.e. (by implication) to listen..." (*Biblesoft's*); we might say to cup the hear, i.e. so we can hear something more clearly.
  5. The word "LORD" stands in for Jehovah.

6. That Jehovah was speaking was reason enough for the children of God to listen attentively to God and comply with his divine instruction, especially in this case, complaints of God against his children (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
- B. "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me," Isa 1:2b NKJV.
1. The word "nourished" pertains to God making Israel physically a nation and spiritually his people, Deut. 32:6.
  2. God literally, through his providence, made a little family into a great nation, Gen. 12:2; Deut. 7:6-8.
  3. Nevertheless, the nation of God became a disobedient people, Jer. 2:6-8.
  4. The word "rebelled" means "to break away (from just authority), i.e. trespass, apostatize, quarrel" (*Biblesoft's*); Vine adds that "rebelled" means "to transgress."
- C. "The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib," Isa 1:3a NKJV; cf. Jer. 8:7.
1. The word "crib" means "manger or stall" (*Biblesoft's*).
  2. Even the donkey is well aware of who fills his feed dish and forgets not to eat, but not so regarding the people of God often; Barnes notes that the ox showed more gratitude toward his master than the Jews did for their God.
  3. The point is that Israel should have been ashamed that mere brute beasts exhibited more sense and loyalty than had God's higher creation man, and more specifically God's covenant people.
  4. Clarke verbalizes it as "[a]n amplification of the gross insensibility of the disobedient Jews, by comparing them with the most heavy and stupid of all animals, yet not so insensible as they."
  5. The word "knows" refers to submissiveness (Barnes); the ox is submissive to its benefactor, but Israel was not submissive to its Benefactor, Jehovah.
- D. "But Israel does not know, My people do not consider," Isa 1:3b NKJV.
1. The word "know" means "(1) to know by observing

and reflecting (thinking), and (2) to know by experiencing” (Vine).

2. The people of God no longer reflected or contemplating divine revelation from Jehovah.
3. The words “my people” mean “a people (as a congregated unit); specifically, a tribe (as those of Israel)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
4. Complaint changes with the ending of verse three and the beginning of verse four to lively and severe indictments by God against his beloved children.

The piercing lamentation of the deeply grieved Father is also the severest accusation. ...The lamentation of God, therefore, is changed now into violent scolding and threatening on the part of the prophet; and in accordance with the deep wrathful pain with which he is moved, his words pour out with violent rapidity, like flash after flash, in climactic clauses having no outward connection, and each consisting of only two or three words. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

- E. “Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters!” Isa 1:4a NKJV.
1. Clarke defines “sinful” as “degenerate”; *Wycliffe* defines “sin” as to “miss the mark.”
  2. The word “laden” means “heavy” (*Biblesoft’s*); Barnes adds that laden means “burdensome.”
  3. Mention of “nation” indicates the “epidemic” proportions of sin among the people of God or that “wickedness was universal” (Henry).
  4. “Iniquity” means “moral evil” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  5. Imagine a person or a whole nation weighed down under a backbreaking and oppressive load of sin.
  6. The “brood” (NKJV) or “seed” (KJV) of “evildoers” refers to the harvest of wickedness, in human terms, spawning itself from generation to generation (Barnes).
  7. “Corrupters” means ‘decayed’ or ‘ruined’ (*Biblesoft’s*); *Wycliffe* says the children of God had putrefied the wholesome Word of God by their grievous sins.
  8. Summarized, the people of God had become proficient in debauchery (Henry).
- F. “They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to

anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward,” Isa 1:4b NKJV.

1. “Forsaken” means “relinquish” (*Biblesoft’s*); Israel had relinquished Jehovah as God.
2. The Israelites had “forsaken” Jehovah internally first, which manifested itself also outwardly.

The idea is that of dissolving connection with a person with violence and self-will; here it relates to that inward severance from God, and renunciation of Him, which preceded all outward acts of sin, and which not only had idolatry for its full and outward manifestation, but was truly idolatry in all its forms. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

3. The word “provoked” refers to the “defiance” Israel exhibited toward Jehovah (Henry).
4. Israel had essentially abandoned (Vine) God, irrespective that it may have claimed allegiance to God when it seemed advantageous.
5. *Wycliffe* says that Israel had essentially “joined the camp of the enemy” of God.
6. The words “Holy One” means “sacred” (*Biblesoft’s*); Israel no longer esteemed God as sacred.
7. “Turned away” means that Israel had made itself as a foreign nation, profane and a stranger to God (*Biblesoft’s*).
8. Idolatry was a primary manifestation of Israel turning its back on God, Jer. 2:27.
9. “Backward” means they had become “estranged” from Jehovah (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
10. Israel was like a “backsliding heifer,” Hos. 4:16.

## II. What principles might we draw from Isa. 1:2-4 to apply to ourselves today?

- A. We need to listen and obey the words of fathers.
  1. When our parents speak that alone is enough reason to listen to them attentively and comply with their parental instructions.
  2. When God our Father speaks to us today through his divine Word, as we read it or when it is faithfully taught or preached, we have an obligation to heed it and order our lives according to divine direction.
  3. Sometimes we may not like what fathers have to say,

- but we will be best served by humbly complying, Deut. 8:5; Heb. 12:5-11.
- B. The children of God must never forget that God is the great Benefactor from whom all blessings flow.
1. God bestows physical blessings, Matt. 5:45; 6:25-34.
  2. God bestows spiritual blessings as well, Phil. 4:19; Jam. 1:17; 2 Pet. 1:3.
  3. However, mankind has often forgotten God, Eph. 4:18.
- C. Like Israel of old, man has often and still does relinquish Jehovah as God of his life.
1. One way a man relinquishes God is by forsaking the assembling with the saints for worship, Heb. 10:25.
  2. Returning to the world of sin relinquishes God, 2 Pet. 2:20-22.
  3. Christians who routinely commit sin no longer esteem God as sacred to them, Heb. 6:6.
  4. In part or wholly, sin in our lives means that we have joined the camp of the enemy of God, Satan's soldiers of sin.
  5. Sin has reached epidemic proportions in our nation, whereby our nation is no longer "one nation under God," Prov. 14:34.
  6. Sometimes even the children of God evidence proficiency in debauchery, 1 Cor. 5:1-13.
- D. When anything rises to such importance in our lives that it crowds out God, we have turned our backs on God.
1. Material wealth is a primary impediment for many people that for them amounts to turning their backs on God, 1 Tim. 6:6-10.
  2. We must have a greater concern for spiritual matters than material things if we want to be pleasing to God, Matt. 6:24, 33-34; 16:26.
  3. We must be submissive to our Benefactor, Jehovah, Luke 6:46.
- E. Wickedness perpetuates itself from generation to generation.
1. The sins of the parents are quickly learned by their children, Gen. 12:13; 20:2; 26:7.
  2. Before long, a sinful way of life becomes a family trait, inherited by practice from generation to generation.

3. Parents need to muster the courage to break the family tradition of sin, beginning with themselves.
- F. Like God, despite loving our children or the children of God, there comes a time when we can no longer overlook their sins.
1. We cannot make excuses for our family members simply because we love them, Deut. 21:18-21; 2 Sam. 7:14.
  2. If we truly want what is good for them in the short term as well as eternally, we will practice what has come to be known as hard love, Prov. 19:18.

**Conclusion:**

1. Tragically, sometimes our children go awry, bringing great grief to us as parents.
2. Sometimes it seems that otherwise dumb animals exhibit more wisdom than do our children from time to time.
3. We can identify with this type of disappointment.
4. Magnified many times, this disappointment is exactly how God hurts when humanity fails to comply with divine instruction and to manifest righteousness.
5. Like loving parents who gladly receive back to themselves wayward children, God awaits the joyful return of prodigal humanity, Luke 15:11-32.

**Invitation:**

1. God awaits with anticipation for every soul to take advantage of his mercy, Psa. 86:15.
2. To acquire initial salvation, every soul must be obedient to the faith, Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 6:17; Mark 16:16.
3. To continue among the saved, erring Christians must acknowledge their sins and pray for forgiveness, 1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22.

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# Futile Sacrifices

## Isaiah 1:10-15 NKJV

**Thesis:** Exposition of Isaiah 1:10-15 and application of principles to the children of God today.

**Song:** *Trust and Obey*

### **Introduction:**

1. Ironically, the very sacrifices and worship that God had commanded that his people, the Israelites, perform became unsatisfactory to God.
2. This is a reoccurring theme in the Bible, even respecting the people of God, 1 Sam. 15:22; Jer. 6:20; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-23.
3. Lifeless and dull-hearted Christian worship, Christian service and Christian living today is no more acceptable to Almighty God than the worship, etc. that he condemned through the Old Testament prophets.
4. Clarke writes: “Sacrifices and prayers are not profitable to the offerer, nor acceptable to...[God] unless accompanied with an upright life.”
5. Mere lip service in religion miserably fails to please Almighty God, Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:7-9.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let’s consider the text of Isaiah 1:10-15.**

- A. Notice verse 10 more carefully.
  1. The Hebrew for the word “hear” means “to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. Butler writes that: “One does not truly hear God’s Word unless he obeys that word (Cf. Jas. 1:22)” (76).
  3. “Give ear unto” comes from a different Hebrew word than the one for “hear” and means “to broaden out the ear (with the hand), i.e. (by implication) to listen” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  4. The word “law” here comes from the Hebrew word *torah* and means “a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue or Pentateuch” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  5. The word “God” is “*elohiym* (el-o-heem’) and means

- “the supreme God,” and differs from the Hebrew *Yehovah* (yeh-ho-vaw’) translated as “LORD” earlier in the verse, meaning “(the) self-Existent or Eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God” (*Biblesoft’s*).
6. The Hebrew word for “people” here means “a people (as a congregated unit); specifically, a tribe (as those of Israel)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  7. Of course, Sodom and Gomorrah refer to the ruined cities at the southern end of the Dead Sea that God destroyed because of their widespread wickedness, Gen. 13:13.
  8. Verse ten postures Almighty God as addressing his chosen people in unflattering terms of Gentiles whose sins were so much of an abomination that God intervened with divine, destructive judgment against them.; obviously, God was sorely displeased with his people to whom he sent the prophet Isaiah (cf. Jer. 23:14; Rev. 11:8).
  9. Barnes summarizes the sentiment of God by his reference to Sodom: “There could have been no more severe or cutting reproof of their wickedness than to address them as resembling the people whom God overthrew for their enormous crimes.”
  10. Remarkably, however severe God’s righteous condemnation of conspicuous sins among the people of Judah and Jerusalem, “they fancied that they could not possibly stand in such evil repute with God, inasmuch as they rendered outward satisfaction to the law” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
- B. Isaiah 1:11 speaks to the Jewish worship that God had instituted, but how unacceptable it had become when practiced by such sinful people.
1. The word “multitude” means “abundance” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. The word “sacrifices” means “properly, a slaughter, i.e. the flesh of an animal; by implication, a sacrifice (the victim or the act)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. In our colloquial language, we might say of the phrase “I am full” that “I’ve had it up to here,” which is not viewed as a good thing at all.

4. “Fed beasts” are “stall-fed” (*Biblesoft’s*).
5. “Delight” is the idea of “to be pleased with, desire” (*Biblesoft’s*).
6. The word for “lambs” means “a ram (just old enough to butt)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
7. Despite the fact that God had commanded this type of worship and his people were going through the motions of offering this type of worship, God poses the underlying questions, ‘Why are you worshipping this way?; apparently the proscribed manner in which they were worshipping God did not correspond with the reasons from which they were worshipping God.
8. *Wycliffe* verbalizes:

These verses do not represent rejection of the validity of blood sacrifices...Rather, they make clear that even right and proper forms of worship are utterly offensive to the Lord when presented by unrepentant worshipers seeking to bribe him to spare them the punishment they deserve. God does not, and cannot, find acceptable even the most lavish and costly offerings the unrepentant may present at the altar. ...When the would-be worshiper has no sincere purpose to abandon his evil ways, his entrance before God at the Temple amounts to an impious trampling (RSV) of the holy precincts (a verb used of the violent intrusion of foreign invaders) rather than a properly reverent treading upon the hallowed pavement.

9. Barnes writes: “He [God] demanded righteousness; and without that, all external offerings would be vain.”
- C. Almighty God in verse 12 continued to scrutinize with questions the motives for which his chosen people were worshipping him.
1. The phrase “when ye come to appear before me” “refers chiefly to the three solemn annual festivals. See Ex 23:14” (Clarke); compare Deut. 16:16.
  2. The words “hath required” have a context of worship (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. Butler explains the sense in which God asks who commanded the sacrifices that Judah offered; “Who required of them such a steady stream of traffic in

- faithless sacrifices?** Not God!” (77 emphasis added).
4. Judah’s worship was no more acceptable to God than the worship of the Lord’s church in Laodicea, Rev. 3:16.
- D. Verse 13 categorizes the Jewish worship that God formerly required as defective as offered by his chosen people.
1. The word “vain” means morally ruined or “useless” (*Biblesoft’s*); Barnes refers to this type of worship as hypocritical.
  2. “Oblations” (“futile sacrifices” NKJV) means “a sacrificial offering (usually bloodless and voluntary)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. “Incense” typifies prayer, which is pointless when prayed by those who do not conform to divine instruction, Psa. 141:2; Rev. 8:3; Luke 6:46.
  4. The words “an abomination” mean morally disgusting (*Biblesoft’s*); God-ordained worship became severely unsatisfactory to God because his people worshipped him “with hollow service, and with hypocritical hearts” (Barnes).
  5. “Assemblies” refer to public meetings (*Biblesoft’s*).
  6. “Iniquity” means “wickedness; specifically an idol” (*Biblesoft’s*); *Keil & Delitzsch* defines the word as “moral worthlessness.”
- E. God expresses himself dramatically in verse 14.
1. “Your appointed feasts,” as *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* observe, refers to “the Sabbath, Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. They alone were fixed on certain times of the year.”
  2. “Hateth” means “to hate (personally)” (*Biblesoft’s*); sins of even the chosen people of God are not an impersonal matter to God, but he is personally offended by man’s sins.
  3. The word “trouble” means “burden” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  4. “I am weary” means “disgusted” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  5. Coffman adds to the chorus of commentators who correctly distinguish between God-given worship practiced by truly pious souls and the empty shell of worship by deadened souls merely mimicking true

worship.

What God protested against in this paragraph is certainly not the faithful observance of those very ceremonies and sacrifices which God had commanded his people to observe, but the substitution of a meaningless observance of such forms and sacrifices without the heartfelt devotion and faithful obedience to all of God's commandments which were supposed to accompany such external observances.

- F. God makes the consequence of sin, even by his chosen people, a known fact in verse 15.
1. The words "spread forth your hands" is a reference to lifting one's hands in prayer as was a longstanding custom, 1 Kings 8:22; 1 Tim. 2:8.
  2. "I will hide" means "to veil from sight, i.e. conceal" (*Biblesoft's*), Psa. 66:18; Prov. 1:28; 28:9; Isa. 59:1-3.
  3. "Prayers" refers to "intercession" in prayer.
  4. The word for "hear" where God says he will not hear is the same as used earlier in the passage; God vowed not to hear intelligently or obey, i.e. respond favorably to intercessory prayers by even his chosen people when they otherwise fill their lives with sinfulness.

## **II. What principles ought we to note from Isaiah 1:10-15 and apply to the children of God today?**

- A. Formal worship, i.e. outward compliance with what God through the Bible has authorized, though absolutely necessary, by itself without one's spiritual investment of himself in it is useless.
1. Regarding the Israelites addressed by God in our passage: "It was nothing but the form, with which they thought they had satisfied God; and therefore it was an abomination to Him" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. Matthew Henry notes respecting the passage of Isaiah 1:10-15 that those convicted by God's complaint acted out their religion as seen by other men, apparently as model children of God, but God sees the inside where mankind cannot see, 1 Sam. 16:7.
  3. Many seemingly pious persons may fool fellow men and they may even fool themselves, but they cannot hoodwink God, Matt. 7:21-23.

- B. Formal worship, i.e. outward compliance with what God through the Bible has authorized, though absolutely necessary, is made useless by worshippers' sinful lives.
1. "Jehovah could not endure festivals associated with wickedness" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. The prayers of persons whose lives are characterized by sin do not have enough spiritual postage to rise above the ceiling of the room in which they are uttered, Prov. 28:9.

**Conclusion:**

1. *Keil & Delitzsch* describe the formally correct but spiritually defective worship of the Old Testament chosen people as "sham-holiness."
2. Barnes summarizes the vain worship found among religious people anciently or now: "Hypocrites abound in outward religious observances just in proportion to their neglect of the spiritual requirements of God's word..."
3. We must agree with Butler when he pens: "To worship without doing God's commandments in the rest of life is no true worship, and any ritual of worship without faith is a hollow mockery" (76), Heb. 11:6.
4. To have God accept our worship, simply put, it must be in spirit and in truth, John 4:24.
5. We must worship God in his own appointed way because we want to worship him, and the balance of our lives must demonstrate holiness, 1 Thess. 4:7.

**Invitation:**

1. Following God's harsh denouncement of his chosen people because of their sins, he offered them hope if they would repent, Isa. 1:16-20.
2. "[T]he love [of God] which is hidden behind the wrath...would gladly break through" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
3. Likewise, God desires every soul today to repent and be saved versus remaining lost, 2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 2:38; 8:22.

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# Let Us Reason Together

## Isaiah 1:18

**Thesis:** Exposition of Isaiah 1:18 and application of principles today.

### **Introduction:**

1. God cannot be fooled, he is aware of **every sin** committed by **every soul** who has ever lived.
2. Yet, instead of punishment for sin that is wholly deserved, Almighty God desires to expunge sin from human souls, 2 Pet. 3:9.
3. However, for this to happen, mankind must cooperate with God on **his terms**, Matt. 11:28-30.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's consider Isaiah 1:18 carefully.**

- A. "Come" means to walk or conduct one's self in a specific way.
  1. Mankind must come to God on his terms, rather than expect God to come to man on his terms.
  2. God is right where mankind left him when mankind walked away from God into the valley of sin.
  3. Since God did not leave man, but man left God, man must return to God.
- B. "Let us reason together" is a remarkable proposition by God to sinful humanity.
  1. *Wycliffe* notes that the phrase "let us reason together" is a "courtroom term. The Lord was saying, 'Let us implead one another as plaintiff and defendant at a court of law.' The defendants in this case were the guilty Israelites..."
  2. God supposes that mankind will clearly see the folly of sin and the appropriateness of complying with divine instruction.

This is addressed to the nation of Israel; and the same exhortation is made to all sinners. It is a solemn act on the part of God, submitting the claims and principles of his government to reason, on the supposition that men

may see the propriety of his service, and of his plan.  
(Barnes)

3. Hence, through logic or application of common sense to the fact of sin and God's willingness to expunge that sin, man needs to implement divine instruction in his life—and God will no longer hold the sin against him.
- C. "The LORD" is translated from the Hebrew word for Jehovah, meaning the "self-Existent or Eternal,... [the] Jewish national name of God" (*Biblesoft's*).
- D. "Sins" means "a crime or its penalty" (*Biblesoft's*).
1. Sins generally of every kind are included.
  2. Every violation of the law of God is sinful, 1 John 3:4.
  3. Every sin no matter how small or insignificant man may view it is capable of condemning one's soul, Rev. 21:8; Rom. 6:23.
- E. The word "be" means "become" (*Biblesoft's*).
- F. "Scarlet" is also translated as "crimson."
- G. "They shall be as white" simply means "to become white" (*Biblesoft's*).
1. *Wycliffe* writes that "the grace of God was able to cleanse them completely and restore them to the snowy whiteness of innocence."
  2. However, God's grace and mercy are conditional upon not perfection but obedience, Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:5; Heb. 5:9.
- H. The word "red" means "to show blood (in the face), i.e. flush or turn rosy" (*Biblesoft's*).
- I. "Crimson" comes from another word than the one translated in this verse as "scarlet."
- J. "Wool" is used in the verse to represent sequentially in this verse purity, contamination by sin and restoration to purity; the imagery is dyed wool "restored to its original undyed whiteness" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

That is, as wool undyed, or from which the color is removed. Though your sins appear as deep-stained, and as permanent as the fast color of crimson in wool, yet they shall be removed—as if that stain should be taken away from the wool, and it should be restored to its original whiteness. (Barnes)

## II. What principles from Isaiah 1:18 ought we to apply to humanity today?

- A. Common sense or logic dictates that only God can take away sins.
1. Barnes represents the illustration of Isaiah 1:18 respecting “scarlet” or “crimson” as pertaining to the permanency of cloth dyed in this color so that only by extraordinary means beyond human ability could it be expunged from the fibers of the cloth.
  2. God, though, can and is willing to expunge deep-seated sins from the fibers of the human soul.
  3. However, mankind must approach God on **his terms!**

That is, the deep, fixed stain, which no human power could remove, shall be taken away. In other words, sin shall be pardoned, and the soul be made pure. White, in all ages, has been the emblem of innocence, or purity; compare Ps 68:14; Eccl 9:8; Dan 7:9; Matt 17:2; 28:3; Rev 1:14; 3:4-5; 4:4; 7:9,13. (Barnes)

- B. Forgiveness of sin taught in Isaiah 1:18 presupposes genuine repentance.
1. Isaiah 1:15 illustrates sinfulness with references to bloody hands.
  2. In Isaiah 1:16-17 God called upon his people cleanse themselves of sin and seek God’s judgments.
  3. James in 4:8 represents the same desire of God to redeem mankind from sin, which though, is only possible when mankind approaches God on **his terms**, cf. Ezek. 18:21-24.
- C. God’s plan for the redemption of humanity, for worship, for Christian living and Christian service is reasonable.
1. We are not saying that theology or religion is something that lends itself to laboratory analysis or that keyed into a computer that it computes.
  2. Rather, it is reasonable for mankind to recognize the supremacy of his Creator and faithfully follow his divine instructions, Jer. 10:23.

### Conclusion:

1. References in the verse to “scarlet,” “red” and “crimson” represent “the Hebrew poetic form of expressing substantially the same thought in both parts of the sentence. Perhaps, also, it denotes

intensity, by being repeated...” (Barnes).

2. Colors, especially white representing purity, is a symbol used throughout both testaments, 2 Chron. 5:12; Ecc. 9:8; Dan. 7:9; Matt. 17:2; Rev. 19:8
3. Scarlet, crimson or blood red in Isaiah 1:18 symbolizes sinfulness in God’s human creation.
4. Essentially, God declared in Isaiah 1:18 that “[t]he reddest possible sin shall become, through His mercy, the purest white” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

#### **Invitation:**

1. Whereas God was willing to receive wayward Judah back to himself if only they would repent, so God will receive men and women today back to himself upon their repentance, i.e. on **his terms**.
2. Unsaved believers must repent and be baptized, Acts 2:38.
3. Baptized believers must repent and pray when they sin, Acts 8:22.

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# Companions of Thieves

## Isaiah 1:23 NKJV

**Thesis:** To show that compromise of divine religion for any reason spells disaster, at least spiritually and usually otherwise as well.

### **Introduction:**

1. From the time of the exodus from Egypt, Israelites had combo religious-civil leadership.
2. Successes and failures either religiously or politically mutually affected both.
3. Hence, when Isaiah wrote Isaiah 1:23, he identified the sad state of Israelite government and their practice of Judaism.
4. We are sadly mistaken if we think that the religious morality of our nation's citizens and government does not have a direct impact on justice and fairness in our nation.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Consider the wickedness into which the nation of Judah had fallen.**

- A. Let's look more closely at some of the words that make up Isaiah 1:23.
  1. The word "rebellious" means "to turn away...morally" (*Biblesoft's*).
  2. The word "gifts" means "a donation" (*Biblesoft's*).
  3. The phrase "followeth after" means "to run after...usually with hostile intent" (*Biblesoft's*); the phrase describes the earnestness with which rulers were willing to exchange justice for a donation.
  4. The word "rewards" means "bribe" (*Biblesoft's*).
  5. "They judge" means "pronounce sentence" or is sometimes translated as "defend" (Psa. 82:3).
  6. The word "cause" means "contest" (*Biblesoft's*), in this cast a legal contest to be decided by the appropriate officials.
  7. "Cause" also means "to strive, contend" (Vine).
- B. The religious-civil leadership of the nation of Judah was morally bankrupt.
  1. Isaiah spoke plainly, unequivocally without fear of

contradiction that the leaders of Judah, i.e. especially judges, were wholly corrupt and devoid of concern for God or justice, Luke 18:1-8.

2. “The prophet says this [Isa. 1:23] without a figure” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
3. The leaders of Judah were rebellious against God and it showed by the corrupted treatment of the defenseless poor who could not afford to pay bribes, Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19.
4. *Wycliffe* notes that the leaders of Judah were arrayed

...against the sovereignty and law of God. These princes and government officials, who were charged with the duty of upholding the law and protecting the public against crime, were covertly in league with the leaders of the underworld...”

5. Barnes observes that the leaders of Judah had become “accomplices” to wicked people, and Clarke calls them “associates” of thieves, cf. Matt. 21:13.
- C. Spiritual departures from divine instruction, even by the children of God, are well documented throughout Scripture.
1. The prophet Daniel summarized the wickedness of the Jews in departing from God, which with them had almost become a family and national tradition, Dan. 9:5-6.
  2. The prophet Micah told of the same wickedness of which Isaiah wrote, Mic. 3:11; 7:3.
  3. It was common for the wicked to attempt to distort justice in their favor through the use of bribes, Prov. 17:23.

## II. What can we learn from the mistakes of the nation of Judah, 1 Cor. 10:1-11?

- A. The child of God must not form partnerships with wicked people, Prov. 29:24; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11.
- B. A child of God cannot become partner with the wicked world except that he first compromise his relationship with God, Ezek. 22:12.
- C. God has a special place in his divine heart for the disadvantaged, especially poor widows and orphans and so must we, Isa. 10:1-2; Zech. 7:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Jam. 1:27.
- D. Christians dare not rebel against God or approve of those

who do rebel against God, 1 Sam. 15:23; Rom. 1:32; 2 Tim. 2:19; Phil. 4:3.

**Conclusion:**

1. The nation of Judah to which Isaiah wrote was morally and politically bankrupt, and they needed to turn back to God for both their spiritual and physical welfare.
2. Our nation can only remain great if its citizens and leaders are morally upright.
3. Success spiritually for us as individuals and physically for the perseverance of our country begins with the course each person pursues religiously.
4. “Neither holy cities nor royal ones, neither places where religion is professed nor places where government is administered, are faithful to their trust if religion do not dwell in them” (Henry).

**Invitation:**

1. Genuine Christians make the best citizens and offer the most promise for the providential perseverance of our nation.
2. You can become a Christian by being baptized into Jesus Christ, Gal. 3:27.
3. Erring Christians can become better Christians by resolving to practice Christianity without compromise, Rev. 2:10.

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# The Mountain of the Lord's House

## Isaiah 2:2-3

**Thesis:** To examine one of the primary Old Testament prophecies concerning the establishment of the Lord's church.

**Song:** *The Church's One Foundation; The Kingdoms of Earth Pass Away*

### Introduction:

1. Isaiah 2:2-3 is one of the primary and most outstanding Old Testament prophecies concerning the establishment of the New Testament kingdom or church.
2. This important prophecy appears a second time in the Old Testament in Micah 4:1-2.
3. Burton Coffman phrased it this way: "This is one of the most important passages in the Word of God, so important, in fact, that God gave the same message through two different prophets."
4. At a time when the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem were facing imminent destruction by the will of God through the agency of the Babylonian Empire, God through Isaiah promised a new, future kingdom in which both Jews and Gentiles would participate.
5. Isaiah 2:2-3 is one of the most detailed Old Testament prophecies about the establishment of the Lord's church.

### Body:

- I. **Let's consider Isaiah 2:2 more carefully:** "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."
  - A. "And it shall come to pass" speaks to the certainty of the prophecy Isaiah was about to unfold to come to fruition.
  - B. "In the last days" is of utmost significance to the timing of the establishment of the New Testament kingdom or church of Christ, Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2.
    1. The word "last" means "end, hence, the future" (*Biblesoft's*).
    2. The words "the last days" has a special prophetic sense

- in both testament of the Bible.
3. “The last days” or “last times” referred to the Christian era, 1 Pet. 1:20.
  4. Matthew Henry comments, “Note, Gospel times are the last days.”
  5. Adam Clarke quotes another that “[w]herever the latter times are mentioned in Scripture, the days of the Messiah are always meant.”
- C. “The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.”
1. The word “mountain” takes on a special prophetic sense applied in both testaments to the Christian era and the establishment of Christianity in Jerusalem, Rev. 21:10.
  2. The word “LORD” stands in for the word “Jehovah” (ASV) and means “self-Existent or Eternal...Jewish national name of God” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. The reference to “house” here is not to the literal temple in Jerusalem, but through the prophecy and subsequent fulfillment, it refers to the New Testament kingdom or Lord’s church, which the apostle Paul called Christians who comprise it “the temple of God,” 1 Cor. 3:16.
  4. The word “established” means “to be erect” (*Biblesoft’s*) or “being firmly anchored and being firm” (Vine), meaning the New Testament kingdom or church would “be fixed, rendered permanent” (Barnes), Dan. 2:44-45.
  5. The words taken together in this context nicely refer to the establishment of the New Testament kingdom or church of our Lord in Jerusalem.
- D. “Exalted above the hills” refers to the primacy of the Lord’s church over every other institution on earth.
1. “Exalted” means “to lift” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. This means “[t]he Kingdom of God will be exalted above the kingdoms of this world (Dan 2:35)” (*Wycliffe*).
- E. “All nations shall flow unto it” speaks to the benevolence of God toward, not just the Jews, but to all humanity, Jews and Gentiles, Rom. 1:16.

1. “All” here means “the whole” (*Biblesoft’s*).
2. The word “nation” means “people; heathen” (Vine).
3. The word “flow” means “to sparkle” (*Biblesoft’s*) and is suggestive of “a broad stream” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*), representative of the steady influx of non-Jewish souls into the New Testament kingdom or church prophesied here.
4. “[T]he literal Temple was a type of the spiritual temple - the NT Church, or body of Christ (Eph 2:21), the beacon light of divine testimony to the world. The gathering of the nations to Jerusalem in eager faith therefore signifies the conversion of the Gentiles” (*Wycliffe*).
5. The conversion of many Gentiles (along with Jews) to form the New Testament kingdom or church was a grand Old Testament theme (sadly, missed by the Jews).

...[T]hey would come in multitudes, like the flowing of a mighty river. The idea of the “flowing” of the nations, or of the movement of many people toward an object like a broad stream, is one that is very grand and sublime; compare Ps 65:7. **This cannot be understood of any period previous to the establishment of the gospel. At no time of the Jewish history did any events occur that would be a complete fulfillment of this prophecy.** The expressions evidently refer to that period elsewhere often predicted by this prophet (**Isa 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:22; 54:3; 60:3,5,10; 62:2; 66:12,19**), when “the Gentiles” would be brought to the knowledge of the true religion. (Barnes emphasis added)

**II. Let’s consider Isaiah 2:3 more carefully: “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”**

- A. “And many people shall go.”
  1. “Many” means “abundant” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. “People” means “a congregated unit” (*Biblesoft’s*).

3. The word “go” means “to walk” (*Biblesoft’s*).
- B. “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD”
1. “Come” means “to walk,” but it comes from a different Hebrew word than the word translated “go” in the phrase “many people shall go” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. The sentence, “Let us go up” comes from still another Hebrew word that means “to ascend” (*Biblesoft’s*).
- C. “The house of the God of Jacob”
1. The word from which the words “the God” come is *elohiym* and means “gods in the ordinary sense; but specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. Today, the house of God is the church of Christ, 1 Tim. 3:15.
- D. “He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.”
1. The words “teach us” literally mean “to lay or throw” and figuratively mean “to point out...to teach” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. “His ways” means “a road...a course of life” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. “His paths” means “a well-trodden road...or a caravan” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  4. God has never left mankind without divine direction, and God has abundantly provided divine instruction in the Christian Age in the form of the New Testament or Gospel, 2 Pet. 1:19-21.
- E. “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”
1. “Zion” is defined as “a mountain of Jerusalem” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. The word “law” in this place is *torah*, meaning “a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue or Pentateuch” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  3. “Word” means “a word; by implication, a matter (as spoken of)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  4. Matthew Henry rightly observes that the “law” under consideration here is the Gospel of Christ: “The gospel is a law, a law of faith; it is the word of the Lord; it went forth from Zion, where the temple was built, and from Jerusalem.”

5. Not the Law (of Moses), but nevertheless a law or code of rules from God (the Gospel or New Testament) would sound forth from Jerusalem; “[t]he law or will of God, under the reign of the Messiah, would proceed from Zion” (Barnes), Jam. 2:8, 12.
  6. “From Jerusalem” corresponds to our Lord’s further prophecy that the Gospel would be sounded forth by the New Testament kingdom or church, first from Jerusalem, Luke 24:47.
- F. The prophecy of nations or people in addition to the Jews seeking God in Jerusalem refers to the Christian era and the establishment of Christianity, Zech. 8:3, 21-23; Gal. 3:8.
1. The Jews had an unwarranted bias against non-Jews.
  2. Patriarchy and Judaism both called for and the Gospel confirmed God’s intention to save all of mankind, Gen. 12:3.

### III. What was the intended application of Isaiah 2:2-3?

- A. Isaiah 2:2-3 is companion to several Old Testament prophecies concerning the New Testament kingdom or church which saw their fulfillment on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ—or in the “last days.”

The N.T. definitely and clearly applies the phrase “latter days” to that period of time which began to run its course with the first advent of Christ (Cf. Acts 2:17 with Joel 2:28; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; I Pet. 1:5, 20; II Pet. 3:3 and I John 2:18). Literally the phrase is, “the last parts of the days,” and means, “the end of the ages” (Cf. I Cor. 10:11). **So the Lord’s house is to be established in its glorified and pre-eminent state in the last parts of the days of the Jewish Dispensation.** (Butler 87 emphasis added)

1. Joel 2:28-32 also prophesied of the establishment of the Lord’s church in the “last days,” Acts 2:16-21.
2. The writer of the Book of Hebrews identifies the Christian Age with the “last days” and Jesus Christ as the primary figure of Christianity, Heb. 1:2.
3. The apostle Peter referred to Christianity as “the last time” or “last times,” 1 Pet. 1:5, 20.
4. The apostle John also identified Christianity as “the

last time,” 1 John 2:18.

5. The apostles Paul and Peter noted in the “last days” or in the Christian era that the kingdom or church would be visited by adversity and turmoil, 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3.
- B. The prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-3 as well as related prophecies regarding the establishment of the New Testament kingdom or church were fulfilled on the birthday of the church, recorded in Acts 2.
1. Barnes writes, “Under the Messiah, through the preaching of the apostles and by the spread of the gospel, this prophecy was to receive its full accomplishment.”
  2. Consequently, what we call the Great Commission was not to the Jews alone, but to all of humanity, Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 2:39.
  3. The fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2-3 and similar prophecies ushered into the New Testament kingdom or the Lord’s church people of all ethnicities or races.

All peoples! No longer exclusively to the Jews. A constant accession of converts streaming, (flowing) from all parts of the world upward to God’s house. This high and pre-eminent mount (Zion—the church) is to serve as a unifying force for the whole world. It is to be a reversal of the dispersion (Babel). (Cf. Matt. 8:10-11; Lk. 13:29; Jn. 10:16; Acts 13:44-47, etc.). (Butler 88)

4. Jews and proselytes first heard the Gospel and entered the New Testament kingdom or church, Acts 2:5-10.
  5. Later, the Samaritans, a race partially Jewish heard the Gospel and were baptized into the kingdom or church (body), Acts 8:5, 12.
  6. Finally, Gentiles also were baptized into the Lord’s church, Acts 10-11.
  7. Now, Jews and Gentiles are baptized into the one body or church, 1 Cor. 12:13.
- C. A summary of several Old Testament kingdom prophecies, of which Isaiah 2:2-3 is a major component, identifies the **when**, the **where**, the **scope** of and the **duration** of the New Testament kingdom or the church.
1. The **when** was the “last days,” which began in the first

- century, Isa. 2:2; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17.
2. The **where** was the city of Jerusalem, Isa. 2:3; Luke 24:47, 49; Acts 1:12; 2:1ff.
  3. The **scope** of the prophecies included all of humanity, Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3:8; Rev. 7:9.
  4. The **duration** of the New Testament kingdom or church is eternal or without end, Isa. 2:2; Dan. 2:44.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Whereas Patriarchy was inaugurated in the Garden of Eden, and Judaism had its beginning on Mt. Sinai, Christianity was initiated at Mt. Zion, a synonym for the city of Jerusalem.
2. Literally, Christianity began with the birthday of the church in Jerusalem on Sunday, May 28, A.D. 33, and its Gospel was first preached on Mt. Moriah in the compound of the Jewish Temple, Acts 5:12.
3. Despite the despair with which the Book of Isaiah was written owing to the impending destruction of the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem (because God would not suffer his rebellious people to continue any longer), the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-3 promised hope respecting the future kingdom or church of our Lord.

### **Invitation:**

1. That hope can be our hope if we become Christians and remain faithful.
2. That Great Commission preached forth beginning in Jerusalem is not complicated or difficult to understand, Mark 16:15-16.
3. Starting but failing to continue faithfully as a Christian is utter folly and spiritual ruin, 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Rev. 2:10.

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# An Ungodly Walk

## Isaiah 3:16-26

**Thesis:** Almighty God passes judgment (approval or disapproval) on personal conduct as well as the combined conduct of especially God's people

### **Introduction:**

1. In Isaiah 3:16-26, God, through the prophet Isaiah, uses a reference to ungodly, worldly women (among the children of God) to depict the horrid state of the nation of Judah leading up to its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
2. God used the Babylonian Empire providentially to (figuratively) spank his rebellious and wayward children.
3. The illustration is as informative about individual human conduct that God hates as well as what the illustration represents, which God also hates.
4. People today can learn valuable principles both from the illustration as well as what the illustration was employed to teach.

### **Body:**

**IV. Notice Isaiah 3:16 more carefully: “Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.”**

- A. “LORD” stands in for “Jehovah” (ASV) and means “self-Existent or Eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God” (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. Almighty God in heaven, **not Isaiah**, spoke despairingly of female conduct and attire in this context.
  2. Almighty God in heaven, **not Isaiah**, used bad feminine conduct as an illustration to condemn the nation of Judah and Jerusalem, its capital city.
  3. Doubtless, Isaiah was credited with and blamed for the message because it was an unpopular statement both about women and the nation of the Jews, 1 Thess. 2:13.
- B. “Haughty” means “to soar, i.e. be lofty” (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. One who is haughty is a prideful person.

2. God condemns pride (in a bad sense) throughout the Bible, Psa. 10:2-6; 73:6; 101:5; Prov. 6:16-17; 8:13; 11:2; 15:25; 16:5, 18-19; 21:4; 29:23; Rom. 1:30; 2 Cor. 10:18; 1 Tim. 3:6; 6:4, 17; 2 Tim. 3:2, 4; Jam. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 John 2:16.
  3. There is a sense, of course, in which one can have pride (i.e., satisfaction or gratification) in a job well done, 2 Tim. 4:6-8.
- C. *Keil & Delitzsch* writes regarding “walk with stretched forth necks”: “They walk with extended throat, i.e., bending the neck back, trying to make themselves taller than they are, because they think themselves so great.”
1. We might say that such a person has his or her nose in the air.
  2. The body language depicted here corresponds to the accusation of being “haughty” or proud.
- D. “Wanton eyes” (KJV, ASV, NKJV), “flirting with their eyes” (NIV) or “seductive eyes” (NASV) means for the word “wanton” “to ogle, i.e. to blink coquettishly” (*Biblesoft’s*), which means “to gain the attention and admiration” (*Merriam*).
1. Adam Clarke remarks that the meaning includes that these women were “setting off their eyes with paint”; compare 2 Kings 9:30; Jer. 4:30; Ezek. 23:40 for examples of the practice.
  2. Proverbs 6:13-14, 25 attributes this practice with which God is displeased to men also.
  3. Women among the people of God were dressing and acting more like prostitutes than godly women, Prov. 7:10, 16-17; contrast 1 Tim. 2:9-10.
  4. We might say that a woman was all painted up with the utmost in makeup and winking or batting her eyelashes.
  5. Butler describes these Israelite women as “unchaste; lewd; licentious; extravagant” (106).
- E. The phrase “walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet” refers to what one today might call “body language” of a certain type.
1. “Mincing” means “to trip (with short steps) coquettishly” (*Biblesoft’s*).

2. “Making a tinkling” refers to “anklets” (*Biblesoft’s*).
3. “With their feet” means “a foot (as used in walking); by implication, a step” (*Biblesoft’s*).

They could only take short steps, because of the chains by which the costly foot-rings worn above their ankles were connected together. These chains, which were probably ornamented with bells...used to tinkle as they walked: they made an ankle-tinkling with their feet, setting their feet down in such a manner that these ankle-rings knocked against each other. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

4. Barnes comments that these women were “walking with an affected gait—a mode which, unhappily, is too well known in all ages to need a more particular description.”

**V. Observe Isaiah 3:17 more closely: “Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts.”**

- A. The first appearance of “the LORD” in verse 17 comes from another Hebrew word ‘Adonay (ad-o-noy’), meaning “the Lord (used as a proper name of God only)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
- B. The second appearance of “the LORD” in verse 17 comes from the Hebrew word transliterated as “Jehovah” (ASV), again meaning, the “self-Existent or Eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God” (*Biblesoft’s*).
- C. “Discover” (KJV), “lay bare” (ASV) or “uncover” (NKJV) means ‘to make bare’ (*Biblesoft’s*).
- D. “Secret parts” refers to female genitals (*Biblesoft’s; Merriam*), or what we might euphemistically call one’s private parts.
  1. God on several occasions through the Old Testament prophets used references to nakedness to describe his disdain for ungodliness, and that he would bring open shame especially upon his wayward people, Isa. 47:3; Nah. 3:5; Jer. 13:22; Ezek. 16:37.
  2. Also, the ancient custom toward captured prisoners of war, men and women, was to strip them naked and have them march into captivity in that humiliating condition, in addition at the mercy of searing heat, biting sandstorms, the night cold, etc., Isa. 20:4.

The description in this verse means, that God would humble and punish them; that they who so adorned themselves, and who were so proud of their ornaments, would be divested of their joyful attire, and be borne naked into captivity in a foreign land. (Barnes)

3. Butler makes an astute observation respecting purposeful conduct and unintended consequences:

Those who delight in immodest exposure will be rewarded with immodest exposure at the hands of vile men. Why are those women who delight in overtly attracting men by their immodesty always so shocked and offended when immodest and vulgar men demonstrate their attractions?! (107)

**VI. Verses 18-24 continue the figure of seductive women, which God vows to punish: “In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, **19** The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, **20** The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, **21** The rings, and nose jewels, **22** The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, **23** The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. **24** And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.”**

A. Let’s define some of the words in verse 18.

1. “Bravery of tinkling ornaments about their feet” (KJV) the ASV renders “the beauty of their anklets.”
2. “Tinkling ornaments” (KJV) is translated as “jingling anklets” in the NKJV.
3. “Cauls” means “a netting for the hair” (*Biblesoft’s*) and is translated “scarves” in the NKJV; Barnes writes of such a netting made of gold and containing numerous rubies.
4. “Round tires like the moon” means “a round pendant” (*Biblesoft’s*) or necklace; the NIV has “crescent necklaces.”

- B. Let's define some of the words in verse 19.
  - 1. "Chains" refers to "a pendant for the ears (especially of pearls)" (*Biblesoft's*) and is translated as "earrings" by the NIV.
  - 2. "Mufflers" means "a long veil (as fluttering)" (*Biblesoft's*) and is translated "veil" in the NKJV.
- C. Let's define some of the words in verses 20-21.
  - 1. "Bonnet" means "a fancy head-dress" (*Biblesoft's*) and is translated "headdresses" in the NKJV.
  - 2. "Ornaments of the legs" comes from a different Hebrew word than already appearing in this context and refers to "an (ornamental) ankle-chain" (*Biblesoft's*) and is translated "ankle chains" in the ASV; Barnes comments that, "The word denotes a small chain, with which females, when they walk, connect their feet, in order to make their steps equal."
  - 3. "Tablets" is translated in the ASV and NKJV as "perfume boxes" and "perfume bottles" in the NIV.
  - 4. "Nose jewels" of verse 21 is translated as "nose rings" in several translations.

**VII. Let's define some of the words in verses 22-23.**

- A. "Changeable suits of apparel" is translated in the ASV as "festival robes."
  - 1. We might call them party or dress clothes.
  - 2. "Mantles" refers to "a cloak" (*Biblesoft's*) and is translated as "outer tunics" in the NASV.
- B. What the KJV calls "wimples," the ASV translates as "shawls."
- C. What the KJV calls "crisping pins" the NKJV translates as "purses."
- D. In verse 23, "glasses" is translated as "hand-mirrors" in the ASV.
- E. Also in verse 23, "fine linen" is "lingerie" (Butler 108) or "undergarments" as translated in the NASV.
- F. Still in verse 23, "the hoods and the veils" are translated as "turbans and the robes" in the NKJV.
  - 1. Clarke describes the veil under consideration here as "transparent garments" designed to "show the shape of every part of the body, but the very colour of the skin."
  - 2. Allurement through immodesty is clearly the aim of

these Jewish women under consideration in this passage.

**VIII. In verse 24, God, through Isaiah, sets aside all the attempts at allurement practiced by seductive women among the people of God.**

- A. “It shall come to pass” speaks to the certainty of God’s announcement of judgment.
- B. “Sweet smell” means “fragrance” (*Biblesoft’s*) and is so translated in the NIV; compare Song of Solomon 4:10 for an example.
- C. “There shall be” comes from the same Hebrew word already in this verse translated “it shall come to pass,” again speaking to the certainty of God’s judgment.
- D. “Stink” means “a melting, i.e. putridy” (*Biblesoft’s*) and is translated as “rotteness” (ASV), “stench” (NKJV) and “putrefaction” (NASV).
- E. “A rent” is translated as “a rope” in several translations.
  - 1. Coffman, among other commentators, notes the use of the rope when formerly survivors from the northern kingdom of Israel were marched back to Assyria:

The contrast between girdle and rope is especially tragic. When Assyria led the northern kingdom into captivity, some 30,000 were herded in long lines to Nineveh with ropes joining the captives by being passed through their ears. These are indeed tragic words for God’s apostate people.

- F. “Well set hair” compares to the extravagance assigned to the hair of which the apostle Peter wrote, 1 Pet. 3:3-4.
- G. “Baldness” would be a troublesome turn of events for women in general and especially for women who prided themselves in making their hair into show pieces, 1 Cor. 11:15.
- H. In place of “stomacher,” the NKJV translates “a rich robe.”
- I. We would associate “sackcloth” with something like a burlap bag, which was worn by mourners, 2 Sam. 3:31; 1 Kings 20:31; 21:27; Job 16:15; Isa. 21:11.
- J. “Burning” means “a brand or scar” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  - 1. Butler comments on the treatment of defeated peoples enslaved in antiquity by their conquerors:

“...instead of beauty marks, they will wear the ugly scars of the branding-irons, (it was a practice of pagan armies in that day to brand or disfigure slaves—especially by castrating men and using branding-irons on women—to forever mark them as slaves)” (108).

K. Add all this up and imagine for a moment the contrasting images of these women among the children of God.

1. *Keil & Delitzsch* comments that there are “twenty-one different ornaments” described in this seductive display of womanhood among the people of God.
2. On one hand, image women among the children of God who arrogantly proud in attitude, reinforced by a nose held high in the air, with enough makeup on to kill, sultry glances toward all men attempting to melt their moral defenses, swaying from side to side, with clanking jewelry from head to foot to sound their presence, layers of flowing and see-through clothes, carrying decorative purses, holding mirrors in which they constantly admire themselves and sporting perfume bottles with which they constantly refreshed themselves.
3. Contrast that with what God had in mind to replace all that pageantry: scabs and baldness in place of hair adorned with silver, gold and jewels; complete nakedness in place of immodest apparel and abundant jewelry; scratchy and ugly burlap bags instead of costly clothes; a rope and a brand burnt into one’s hide like cattle receive.
4. Contrast with both of these God’s woman, Prov. 31:10-31; 1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:1-6.

**IX. Verses 25-26 clearly transform God’s condemnation from merely ungodly, seductive women among the people of God to the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem: “Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. **26** And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.”**

A. Let us define some words in verses 25-26.

1. “Her gates shall lament and mourn” is a common reference in Scripture to commentary on fallen inhabitants of a city, Isa. 14:31; Jer. 14:2; Lam. 1:4.

2. The phrase “being desolate shall sit upon the ground” compares to a later prophecy by Jesus about the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, Luke 19:44.
- B. All of the description of seductive, ungodly women in this foregoing verses illustrates the despicable condition of the entire nation and especially its capital city, Jerusalem.
1. God used condemnation of women to represent his displeasure toward a larger body of the people of God, Isaiah 32:9-14.
  2. “The significance of Isa. 3:26 is that it unconsciously shifts from ‘the women of Jerusalem,’ to Jerusalem itself, indicating that the vainglorious women were a type of Jerusalem in its apostasy” (Coffman).
- C. The contrast between how the ungodly, seductive women viewed themselves and God would bring them low illustrates God’s intention to bring low ungodly Judah and Jerusalem.
- X. The deplorable condition of the populace illustrated by ungodly seductive women God’s equal displeasure with his people in general yields principles worthy of our consideration today.**
- A. The purpose of one’s earthly existence can be easily forgotten and amply demonstrated by the way we dress and conduct ourselves.
1. Speaking of the women Isaiah described, *Wycliffe* writes: “They had devoted themselves to the latest fads in jewelry, hair style, and dress. They were wholly taken up with self-adornment, having no concern for God’s law or their holy mission in life.”
  2. Isn’t it obvious that society today, including within the Lord’s church, that even Christian women often are more concerned about the latest fads, particularly regarding fashion, than interested in God’s law or their holy mission in life?
- B. The condition of the fiber of society, our nation and the church is visible through the component parts, people.
1. Simple observation tells the reflective person that our society, nation and religion in general is in a lot of peril because of the faults or sins of individuals.
  2. The Lord’s church, too, is in a lot of peril because of the faults or sins of individuals within the Lord’s

church.

3. Christians need to ask themselves if they are part of the solution or part of the problem.
- C. Especially Christians should exemplify what is godly rather than reflect the conduct, fads and fashion of the ungodly world around us, John 17:15-16.
1. The clothing and conduct of some people immediately makes one think that they have religious conviction.
  2. Yet, the clothing and conduct of most people never causes anyone to consider them as religious or spiritually minded.
  3. When someone sees or hears you, does he think you are a spiritually minded religious person?

**Conclusion:**

1. Matthew Henry assesses this passage under consideration thus: “The prophet’s business was to show all sorts of people what they had contributed to the national guilt and what share they must expect in the national judgments that were coming. Here he reproves and warns the daughters of Zion, tells the ladies of their faults...”
2. There was a direct correlation between the condition of womanhood in ancient Judah to the spiritual health of that nation, and a similar correlation exists in our nation, and more importantly in the church, regarding the state of womanhood.

When women are wholly vain and self-centered, the cancer of moral decay has begun to consume a nation or a people. Proper adornment and true beauty in women should never call attention to themselves but should direct the beholder’s attention to God and His Son. When women cultivate beauty only for itself, they are infringing upon and detracting from the glory of God. Such vainglory might be expected in women of the world, but “the daughters of Zion” (which today is the church) must exemplify the beauty of holiness!...when women go bad, their degradation can cause such an upheaval (sic) in society that the very foundations of that society are destroyed. (Butler 106, 108)

Corruption may have spread far and done much evil in the community; but there is hope for the city or the

church so long as the wives and the mothers, the daughters and the sisters retain their moral and spiritual integrity. When that is gone, all is gone. Purity and worth find their last retreat under the domestic roof; if they be driven thence, they are doomed to die; and with that death any community, church or nation shall soon perish. (Clarkson qtd. in Coffman)

3. When Isaiah wrote, the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem were about to be destroyed by the will of God and at the hands of the Babylonians.
4. What was wrong with womanhood among the people of God at that time typified what was wrong with the nation of God's people.

**Invitation:**

1. Individuals and collectively the church need to adhere to divine instruction and put from them walk of ungodliness, 2 Cor. 13:5.
2. Individuals turn from ungodliness by becoming Christians, Acts 2:38; 11:26.
3. Christians turn from ungodliness that sometimes creeps into their lives by repentance and prayer, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# What Could Have Been Done More?

## Isaiah 5:1-7

**Thesis:** To demonstrate that God having done his part and all that he can do for human redemption, man's response, therefore, determines his acceptance or rejection by God.

**Song:** *I Want to Be a Worker*

### **Introduction:**

1. God, through the prophet Isaiah in 5:1-7, used a reference from agriculture to illustrate his divine provision for his people, the Israelites.
  - a. Every last detail was optimum or perfect for producing a bumper crop of grapes from the vineyard in the illustration.
  - b. Nevertheless, the harvest was useless and had to be discarded.
2. The vineyard that had every advantage and still produced wild grapes represented the Israelites.
  - a. The northern kingdom of Israel had already produced its wild grapes, and its harvest had been discarded effectively when God permitted the Assyrians to destroy it and remove its principle survivors from the land.
  - b. The southern kingdom of Judah had produced its wild grapes and as Isaiah wrote, God was about to discard its harvest by permitting the Babylonians to destroy it and carry its principle survivors from the land.
3. Jesus Christ used similar illustrations from agriculture in his ministry to forewarn the first century Jewish nation of its impending doom because of its own wild grapes.
  - a. Jesus presented a parable about a fruitless fig tree in a vineyard that he proposed be cut down if it still produced no figs even after receiving extra special attention to promoting its growth, Luke 13:6-9.
  - b. Jesus also taught a parable about a vineyard wherein the servants attending the vineyard wrested the vineyard for themselves, even killing the heir to the vineyard, for which the

owner of the vineyard slew the robbers and murders, Matt. 21:33-45; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19.

- c. Again, Jesus used the illustration of a vineyard in John 15:1-6 in the same way God through Isaiah employed the same illustration in 5:1-7.
4. God has done his part and all that he can do for human redemption without violating his nature as God, i.e. his holiness and justice.
  - a. Therefore, if man's response to God's plan for man is rebellion or disobedience, man will be lost eternally, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.
  - b. However, if man's response to God's plan for man is obedience, man will be saved eternally, Heb. 5:9.
5. Let's see what principles we may be able to apply to ourselves today after a closer examination of Isaiah 5:1-7.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's more closely examine Isaiah 5:1-7.**

- A. This context begins by framing its text as a song descriptive of an agricultural setting, an ancient vineyard.
  1. The song is a love song about and to the loved.
  2. Like many love ballads of all ages, this love song is about unrequited love.
  3. God, through the prophet Isaiah, wrote this love song about his chosen people.
- B. This context provides an explicit description of the process of establishing and maintaining a vineyard in ancient Palestine.
  1. This vineyard occupied a choice hillside especially prepared for grape production: "very fruitful hill," v. 1.
  2. The vineyard was "fenced" to protect it from wild animals, v. 2.
  3. The ground was prepared by removing stones from the planting area, v. 2.

<p>The vineyard was placed on the hillside where there was good drainage and where the grapes could catch the sun. The land was first terraced so as to use up the stones that littered the soil, at the same time providing a means of soil conservation during the heavy rains. The plot was then surrounded by a wall and a ditch, the excavated soil from the ditch forming the foundation for the wall. A fence of thorns was placed on top of the</p>
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wall to keep out any damaging wild animals (Proverbs 24:30–31; Song of Songs 2:15). Psalm 80:12–13 mentions human beings who might raid the vineyard to steal the fruit, although the law allowed grapes to be picked so long as they were not carried away in a container (Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 23:24). The soil was prepared by turning it over with a mattock (Isaiah 5:2). (Gowers)

4. The best vine was planted, anticipating the best possible crop of grapes, v. 2, precisely, “a vine stock (properly, one yielding purple grapes, the richest variety)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  5. “It perhaps takes its name from Sorek, mentioned in Judg 16:4, not far from Eshcol, which was famed for its grapes” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
  6. A tower was built in the center of the vineyard as a place for the vinedressers to reside and from which the vineyard could be protected from animals and thieves, v. 2.
  7. A winepress, “a trough (as dug out)” (*Biblesoft’s*), was hewed in bedrock for acquiring juice from the harvest of grapes, v. 2.
- C. This context presents the problem of human failure and divine disappointment through the figure of a vineyard.
1. “...the owner of the vineyard spared no attention or trouble” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).
  2. Despite the nth degree in preparation, the harvest was worthless.
  3. Worse than worthless, “wild grapes” literally mean “poison-berries” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  4. Consequently, God would punish his people.

A “hedge” is a fence of thorns, made by suffering thorn-bushes to grow so thick that nothing can pass through them. Here it means that God would withdraw his protection from the Jews, and leave them exposed to be overrun and trodden down by their enemies, as a vineyard would be by wild beasts if it were not protected. ...Vineyards, it seems, had a “double” enclosure. - “Gesenius.” Such a double protection

might be necessary, as some animals might scale a wall that would yet find it impossible to pass through a thorn-hedge. The sense here is, that though the Jews had been protected in every way possible, yet that protection would be withdrawn, and they would be left defenseless. (Barnes)

5. Butler allegorizes a bit respecting the Isaiah parable and Judah.

It is God's vineyard by absolute right. He planted it upon land which was His. He planted it in a very productive, conspicuous place in the midst of civilization (on a fertile hill); He cleared it of all hindrances of foreigners (gathered out the stones); He built protective fortresses within it (watchtower); He made provisions to use the fruits of the nation (built a winepress). Then with Divine patience and long-suffering He cultivated this nation with great blessings of deliverance and chastening. He sent His servants the leaders and prophets to tend it. He had every right to anticipate an abundant harvest of sweetness; instead it produced wildness, putridness and rottenness. (116)

6. The words "judgment" and "oppression" are coupled, as are the words "righteousness" and "cry," and form a "play upon words" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
  7. "Halley explained that the Hebrew here uses pairs of words to contrast what God looked for and what he received. These words, similar, and almost identical in sound have radically different meanings" (Coffman).
  8. "Judgment" means "verdict," and "oppression" equals "slaughter"; "cry" means "shriek" (*Biblesoft's*); hence, God's retribution was to be certain as well as severe.
- D. This context solicits its recipients' acknowledgement of human failings before identifying the offenders, cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-12.
1. Verse 3 calls upon the recipients of the prophecy to rationally observe if the gardener is to blame, given the extraordinary effort and preparation he made, for the worthless crop.
  2. The question is rhetorical and supposes that only one

answer could be forthcoming, i.e. the gardener is not to blame.

3. Though an inanimate vineyard cannot be blameworthy, the vineyard in the illustration is surmised to be blameworthy in v. 3, especially since the vineyard represents the wayward nation of Judah, noted later in this context, v. 7.
4. “The Jewish people are often represented under the image of a vineyard, planted and cultivated by God; see Ps 80; **Jer 2:21**; 12:10” (Barnes emphasis added).

## **II. What principles can we glean from Isaiah 5:1-7 for application today?**

- A. God is interested in the spiritual success of humanity.
  1. Though all of humanity old enough to know the difference between right and wrong commits sins, God desires all men to repent, Rom. 3:23; 2 Pet. 3:9.
  2. Consequently, God the Father sent his Son into the world so that mankind could be saved, John 3:17; Luke 19:10.
  3. In addition, God the Father sent divine revelation into the world so that mankind could know how to be saved, 2 Pet. 1:21; John 16:13; Gal. 1:11-12; Rom. 1:16.
- B. God has done everything he possibly can do on his part for human redemption, short of violating his holiness and justice.
  1. “God has done all that could be done for the salvation of sinners, consistently with His justice and goodness” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
  2. God cannot save mankind directly in spite of his sin without violating the characteristics that in part make him Deity, Jam. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:16; Rom. 1:17.
  3. Jesus gave the plan of salvation, Mark 16:16.
  4. The apostle Peter declared the plan of salvation on the birthday of the church, and the message had not changed decades later, Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21.
- C. Individuals must accept personal responsibility for being either lost or saved.
  1. “There comes a point in God’s dealing with man beyond which God can do no more to produce good

- fruit in man's life" (Butler 116).
2. Essentially, God having done his part respecting human salvation, mankind decides where he will spend eternity.
  3. Those with obedient faith will be saved, Rom. 1:5; 16:26; Heb. 5:9.
  4. Disobedient souls will be forever lost, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

**Conclusion:**

1. The substance of the parable in Isaiah 5:1-7 is:

They shall no longer be distinguished as a peculiar people, but be laid in common: I will take away the hedge thereof, and then it will soon be eaten up and become as bare as other ground. They mingled with the nations and therefore were justly scattered among them. (Henry)

2. "In Mt. 21:33–46 Jesus interprets the parable of Isa. 5:1–2, which, in the Old Testament context, identifies the vineyard as Israel (cf. Isa. 5:7)" (Karleen).

If the audience of the prophet has not already surmised who was being evaluated, the prophet would not leave it to doubt. The vineyard is Judah—God's covenant people (Israel does not here necessarily refer to the northern kingdom, but is synonymous with covenant-people). This is like Nathan's statement to David, "thou art the man!" God looked for His people, with all their advantages of having His word and being sustained by His power and seeing His love, mercy, justice and goodness exhibited, to produce the same kind of character—justice and righteousness. **Having all this and appropriating it are two different things!** (Butler 117 emphasis added)

**Invitation:**

1. God having done his part toward human salvation, it remains for mankind to appropriate redemption from sin on God's terms.
2. We simply pose the question put to Saul of Tarsus (better know to us later as the apostle Paul), Acts 22:16.
3. Further, erring Christians also can appropriate redemption of recent sins, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# Calling Evil Good and Calling Good Evil

## Isaiah 5:20

**Thesis:** To properly distinguish between righteousness and unrighteousness, despite the confused or reversal of definitions alleged by an ungodly world.

### **Introduction:**

1. It hardly seems imaginable, but the people of God in the days of the prophet of Isaiah—the nation of Judah—had become so religiously and morally corrupted that they actually had inverted God’s value system, which he had given them by divine revelation.
  - a. The *New Bible Dictionary* paraphrases Isa. 5:20, “Woe, then, to those who invert the divine scale of values, giving the name of good to what God calls evil, and vice versa (Is. 5:20).”
  - b. *Wycliffe* describes those of Isa. 5:20 as “[g]uilty of reversing the standards of morality.”
  - c. We can illustrate the magnitude and nonsense of this degree of tampering with God’s value system by imagining the absurdity of someone calling white black and calling black white.
  - d. Or, to demonstrate what it means to invert something and how useless to invert something can be, imagine someone turning a glass filled with water upside down.
2. When we look around us today, we see that non-Christians likewise have inverted God’s value system in what once was often referred to as a Christian nation.
  - a. Society today is a far cry from the days depicted by “Little House on the Prairie” or “The Waltons.”
  - b. Throughout our nation and the world, essentially we live amidst a moral cesspool of ungodliness and sin.
3. Worse yet, often Christians themselves evidence that they, too, have inverted God’s value system just like their counterparts in those to who the prophet Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 5:20.
  - a. Often, Christians engage in so many of the same vices as the ungodly world around us that the world cannot distinguish between themselves and a member of the church.

- b. Some Christians like their worldly counterparts dress (or undress) like the world, take drugs, drink alcohol, curse, lie, steal, commit gross immoralities, view pornography, et al.
- c. There is no real difference between sinners and Christians when they commit the same sins, Rom. 2:1-3.

**Body:**

**I. Contemporary society has blurred the distinction between right and wrong.**

- A. Society disputes God’s right to decide what is sinful and what is not sinful.
  - 1. Albert Barnes said of Isaiah’s contemporaries, and we could say of our contemporaries, Isaiah 5:20 is a “...general reference to those who confound all the distinctions of right and wrong, and who prefer the wrong.”
  - 2. What the writer of Hebrews calls “the pleasures of sin for a season” are allowed to override what God says in his inspired Word, Heb. 11:25.

**Sin Is Delusional.** Often, someone will say he does not see anything wrong with gambling, dancing, premarital sex, or some unauthorized act in worship. Such an individual is absolutely right. He does not see anything wrong. Sin has blinded him (2 Cor. 4:4). ... Jeremiah penned, “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush” (Jer. 6:15). How sad when individuals cannot distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. Such a person is delusional. In fact, when the prodigal determined to repent and go home to his father, the text declares, “And when he came to himself” (Luke 15:17). Sin will not allow the sinner to be rational or to be reasonable. (Grider 304)

- B. Ungodly people are not content with practicing ungodliness themselves.
  - 1. They harass godly people for their godliness, calling good people for the good they exhibit in their lives bad people, e.g. homophobic, Gen. 19; 1 Cor. 6:9 NKJV.
  - 2. “In justifying that which is evil, the wicked also condemn that which is righteous and good” (Jones 345), but God has ruled already on justifying

wickedness and condemning righteousness, Prov. 17:15; Mal. 2:17.

3. They praise ungodliness and encourage other people to engage in the same ungodliness, Rom. 1:32.
4. Matthew Henry described those of Isaiah's day and our contemporaries as those:

Who confound and overthrow the distinctions between moral good and evil, who call evil good and moral evil (v. 20), who not only live in the omission of that which is good, but condemn it, argue against it, and, because they will not practise it themselves, run it down in others...not only do that which is evil, but justify it, and applaud it, and recommend it to others as safe and good.

## **II. Contemporary society has replaced a divine standard of values for personalized subjectivism.**

- A. First, God is dethroned, so that his system of righteousness is deemed inapplicable and of no consequence.
  1. Some cried out in the 1970's that "God is dead!" thinking that by adopting such a philosophy they could liberate themselves from the necessity of complying with the Word of God in their lives, permitting the rise of the so-called sexual revolution.
  2. Others—atheists—have persuaded themselves that there is no God to whose rules they must conform so that every deed in life is right or wrong solely in the eyes of the beholder with no moral consequence in this life or eternity.

Where there is no faith in God there are no clear-cut moral distinctions—no clear conception of what is right and wrong. There can only be moral relativism—a thing is right because we want it to be...moral anarchy. ..."If there is no God everything is permissible." (Butler 121)

- B. After rejecting God and his value system, mankind substitutes his own value system.
  1. Like the Jews of Isaiah's day or the contemporaries of the apostle Paul in the first century, misguided persons may even claim to be abiding by God's Word while

- supplanting it with their own system, Rom. 10:1-3.
2. Mankind is famous (infamous, really) for valuing his own devices over God's divinely revealed will, Prov. 14:12; 16:25.
  3. Mere human wisdom is always at odds with the divine wisdom of God, Isa. 5:21; Prov. 3:7; 1 Cor. 1:18-21.
  4. Denominationalism today is a prime example of man attempting to do things religiously and morally his own way instead of abiding by the Word of God, Matt. 15:9; Luke 6:46.

### **III. Contemporary society has completely realigned God's value system by redefining or re-labeling the designations for sin.**

- A. In the new dictionary of biblical words that mankind substitutes for what the Bible decrees, **there are no sins!**
  1. James Burton Coffman writes in his commentary: "Calling sins by names that appear to approve of them is an old satanic trick. Thus the infidel is called a free thinker; the drunkard is called sociable; the alcoholic suffers from alcoholism; the stingy is called thrifty, etc."
  2. We might add that fornication is sanitized by referring to it as it consensual or calling it a trial marriage if more than one night stands; homosexuality is styled an alternate lifestyle; adulterers and adulteresses are swingers; taking illicit drugs is referred to as recreational; the murder of abortion is upgraded to being pro-choice; alcoholism is relegated to the category of disease; etc.
- B. Our nation can no longer be rightfully referred to as a Christian nation!
  1. "Sadly, under Satan's influence, our nation daily moves closer to societal and governmental approval of that which God plainly and powerfully condemns (cf. Isa. 5:20)" (Liddell 768).
  2. Our nation is quickly expunging all public references to God, and then media, political leaders and the citizens of our nation have the audacity to express amazement at the widening disregard for law in general and the increasing frequency of horrible crimes throughout the country.

3. Almighty God will not suffer this nation to continue in greatness in so many ways if it and its citizens turn away from him!

#### **IV. God's people have the responsibility to correctly recognize God's standard of righteousness and act accordingly.**

- A. We must hate the things that God hates and love the things that God loves, Amos 5:15; Rom. 12:9.
  1. We must not gamble instead of nurture the work ethic, Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12.
  2. We must not lie, covet things that do not belong to us, steal, commit sexual immoralities, dabble with the occult, cause division, envy, murder, etc., 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8.
  3. We must think pure things, Phil. 4:8.
  4. We must add to our lives Christian virtues, 2 Pet. 1:5-8.
- B. We must actively resist sin in the world around us, Eph. 5:11.
  1. We cannot either do in our lives the things God hates or have pleasure in the things God hates when done by others, Rom. 1:32.
  2. "Though Satan minimizes sin and the world calls evil good, we must rebuke sin (Isa. 5:20; I Tim. 5:20; II Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:13)" (Liddell 778).
  3. Resist the introduction of gambling into a community where it may not be already.
  4. Resist the expansion of bars, liquor licenses and bawdy clubs in our communities.
  5. Resist the moral travesties of abortion, so-called homosexual rights, etc. at the polling places and informationally in lawful disseminations of facts.

#### **Conclusion:**

1. God has already decided what is good or righteous and what is bad or unrighteous (sinful), but man is ever up to his old tricks of attempting to devise his own standard of righteousness, Rom. 10:1-3.
2. When through such subjectivism every person is left to determine for himself or herself what is right and what is wrong, God and his Word are certainly disregarded and humanity descends into anarchy and chaos, Judges 17:6; 21:25.

3. Mankind is the big loser when he purports to upend God's value system, as though somehow God were obligated to accept man's counterproposal to God's dictates.

God has spoken regarding living godly, righteous lives. God has determined what is "right" and what is "wrong," and man does not have the right to alter God's plan to meet his whim or preference. Man may call evil good (Isa. 5:20), but it is still evil and damning in the sight of Almighty God. (Sain 64)

**Invitation:**

1. God will no more honor a manmade plan of salvation than he will accept counterproposals respecting worship or godly living.
2. The simplest expression of what God requires of mankind for initial salvation was expressed by Jesus himself, Mark 16:16.
3. Fortunately, God also had recorded in the New Testament his plan for the subsequent salvation of Christians when they sin, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# Spiritual Deafness and Blindness

## Isaiah 6:9-10

**Thesis:** To discern the amazing capacity of the Word of God respecting salvation to be easily understood by honest hearts and seem difficult to spiritually deficient souls.

### **Introduction:**

1. The phraseology of Isaiah 6:9-10 appears several times in both testaments of the Bible, Isa. 29:13-14; 43:8; 44:18; Jer. 5:21; Matt. 13:14-15; etc.
  - a. Matthew Poole writes: “These words of the prophet are not less than five times found in the New Testament (besides by Matthew in these verses [13:14-15]) applied to the Jews.”
  - b. Salvation in God’s Word is apparent to those who earnestly and honestly seek salvation on God’s terms.
  - c. However, God’s Word is mysterious to those whose hearts are not honest with the Word of God and who will not seek salvation on God’s terms.
  - d. “Light enough is given in Revelation to guide those sincerely seeking to know, in order that they may do, God’s will; darkness enough is left to confound the willfully blind (Isa 43:8)” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
2. In the first century ministry of Jesus Christ, the principle of Isa. 6:9-10 was manifested in our Lord’s use of parables, Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:9-10.
3. God and the Word of God are somewhat like the affect of the sun on different substances.
  - a. For instance, the same sunlight that hardens clay melts butter.
  - b. This is the sense by which God through the Word of God is said to have hardened the hearts of the ungodly, John 12:39-40; Rom. 11:8.
  - c. Hardheartedness is self-inflicted, Jer. 6:10; Zech. 7:11.
4. Most first century Jews were not really interested in the Word of God, which hastened the taking of the Gospel to non-Jews (Gentiles), Acts 28:26-28.

5. Worse, many Christians were not interested in hearing the Word of God either, Heb. 5:11.

**Body:**

**I. Let's look at Isaiah 6:9-10 more carefully.**

- A. Many of the words in our text do not need any special attention to fully understand their true significance, but particular attention to some words will prove helpful.
- B. The word **“understand”** in verse 9 means “to separate mentally (or distinguish)” (*Biblesoft's*).
1. W.E. Vine includes in the definition for “understand” here to “pay attention to, regard, notice” (Vine).
  2. This means that the hearer of God's Word has the responsibility to ‘handle aright the word of truth,’ 2 Tim. 2:15 ASV.
- C. The word **“perceive”** in verse 9 means “to know (properly, to ascertain by seeing)” (*Biblesoft's*).
1. W.E. Vine remarks about “perceive” that its meaning includes “get acquainted with, gain understanding, examine.”
  2. The Israelites to whom Isaiah wrote had failed to “know” God's will for them by not ascertaining from examination of God's Word his divine instructions.
- D. W.E. Vine includes in the definition for **“hear”** in verse 10 “hearken” and “obey.”
1. The people of God in Isaiah's day as well as either in the ministry of Jesus or among people today often refused to sample the Word of God with the intention of performing divine instruction in their lives, Luke 6:46.
  2. God and his Holy Word can hardly get an audience with the people of this world, and often the people of God have little more time for God and his Word.
  3. The pleasures of sin and the lusts of this life rather fill up our lives, Heb. 11:25; 1 John 2:15-17.
  4. Even harmless pursuits are no longer harmless when they displace God and time that ought to be spent digesting his Word, e.g. sports, television, recreation, family, rest or sleep, etc.
- E. The word **“convert”** in verse 10 means “to turn back (hence, away)” (*Biblesoft's*).

1. Conversion then or now can only occur after one turns from the way of sin back to God.
  2. The Gospel calls upon people to “be converted” (KJV) or “turn again” (ASV), Acts 3:19.
  3. The Gospel not only rescues non-Christians from sin, but Jam. 5:19-20 says of the erring Christian that it ‘converts’ (KJV) or “turns him back” (NKJV), Jam. 5:19-20.
- F. The words “**be healed**” mean “to mend (by stitching)” (*Biblesoft’s*).
1. Mankind is broken through waywardness and sin, but God is willing to suture us back together when we come back to him on his terms, Rev. 22:2.
  2. Yes, even Christians can fall away in sin, but from which they can be rescued, Heb. 10:25; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

## II. What principles might we note from Isaiah 6:9-10 that we can apply to ourselves today?

- A. Jesus verified the complete fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in the persons of the Jewish religious leaders of his day, Matt. 13:14-15.
1. “[F]ulfilled...means to fill up like a cup...Here it means that the prophecy of Isaiah is fully satisfied in the conduct of the Pharisees and Jesus himself points it out” (*Robertson’s*).
  2. *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament* says that Isaiah’s prophecy “is being fulfilled” or “in process of fulfillment” in Matt 13:14 in Jesus’ day.
  3. Vine related that “fulfilled” here means to fill up completely.
  4. Adam Clarke says that “fulfilled” in Matt. 13:14 correctly means being fulfilled again.

Is AGAIN fulfilled: this proper meaning of the Greek word has been generally overlooked. The evangelist means, that as these words were fulfilled in the Jews in the time of the Prophet Isaiah, so they are now again fulfilled in these their posterity, who exactly copy their fathers’ example. **These awful words may be again fulfilled in us, if we take not warning by the things**

**which these disobedient people have suffered.**  
(emphasis added)

5. “It is true and may be applied in every age” (Boles).

Isaiah describes a spiritual state that existed in the time of Christ, and is often met still, when, on account of hardness of heart and love of the world, men cannot understand the gospel and be converted. It is caused by their own fault. If they would fall out with sin, and come to Christ with a broken and contrite spirit, they would be healed. (Johnson)

- B. God’s people throughout history have experienced an ear or hearing problem respecting the Word of God.
1. The Jewish Sanhedrin stopped its ears at the preaching of the Gospel by Stephen, degenerated into a wild mob, whereupon they murdered the preacher, Acts 7:57.
  2. The apostle Paul prophesied that even Christians would turn their ears from the truth to false doctrines that they find more appealing, 2 Tim. 4:4.
  3. Fowler writes, “[I]t is the people whose mind has grown impervious, **whose ears are bored with listening**” (138 emphasis added), which aptly describes too many of God’s people in every congregation of the churches of Christ in our day.
- C. Albert Barnes comments on people shutting their eyes to the Word of God: “It denotes here the state of mind which is more and more indisposed to attend to the truth.”
1. *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament* compares the physical condition of a “cataract” to the spiritual condition described as shutting the eyes here in Isa. 6:10 and Matt. 13:15.
  2. That’s the way it was in Isaiah’s day; that’s the way it was during the ministry of Jesus Christ; and, that is the way it is today, unfortunately.

How like our day as well. In the United States we have a plethora of Bibles, thus having God’s Word available to us. Yet, how many today know God’s Word? Even among Christians, we have a woeful lack of knowledge. We find it difficult to get our people to read God’s

Word, much less study it. Many Christians could not tell someone the plan of salvation, the worship of the church, the organization of the church, or other basic tenants and give Bible verses for evidence of such. While most still follow the way of God in these matters, it is more from custom than conviction. Show where our lives or ways do not conform to the Truth, and then we see the rebellion people. (Hatcher 142-143)

3. However, God's intention is that wayward humanity "[b]e restored from the malady of sin; be recovered and pardoned" (Barnes).

### **Conclusion:**

1. Isaiah had the responsibility to forewarn his people respecting God's punishment for their sins, though God knew that they would not hearken and obey him.
2. We, too, as faithful Christians have the responsibility to evangelize the world that is within our reach with the Gospel, knowing that few will respond to God's call for salvation on his divine terms.
  - a. "God gave Isaiah a difficult task. He would be charged to preach to those who would refuse to hear—yet he preached anyway" (Martin 424).
  - b. Jesus acknowledged that comparatively few souls would be saved, Matt. 7:13-14.
  - c. The apostle Paul used to a great Gospel meeting or a riot (or both) experienced neither in Athens, and few there obeyed the Gospel, Acts 17:34.
3. Butler summarizes the mission of Isaiah (and our mission as Christians) toward a world largely disinterested in the Word of God.

It will appear that Isaiah's ministry is a complete failure. People will hear him but not understand. In fact, the more they hear the more adamant they will be against what they hear. ...Their thoughts will be so thoroughly world-oriented they will be deaf and blind to spiritual things. ...How many men would be willing to say, Here am I; send me, today, if they knew that their mission would be as difficult and bereft of any apparent success (as the world measures success)? Yet we all need to renew in our minds the promise of Jesus,

the servant is not above his Master. If they rejected Jesus, they will reject the messengers of Jesus. But we **are not to become discouraged. God does not measure success like the world measures it. God demands faithfulness—and He, Himself, takes care of the success.** (132-133 emphasis added)

4. Another excellent observation from Matt. 13:14-15 appears at the pen of Harold Fowler.

Far from being bleak and foreboding to Jesus' disciple-evangelists, these words comfort bewildered men, stunned by Jesus' apparent lack of success. By citing Isaiah's generation, He reminds them that God's greatest prophets down through the ages have encountered the same spiritual insensitivity and the same lack of response. But, far from offering them merely more company in their misery, He lifts them into the same mighty work where God's finest prophets had toiled. If this text applies principally to Jesus' relation to His listeners, it finds application over and over again in the experience of His heralds. Any unsuccess they would encounter had already been foreseen and explained by the Lord of the harvest. It was already part of the common problem of God's greatest spokesmen, all part of the program, hence, nothing new or surprising. (136)

### **Invitation:**

1. Above all, we must make sure that we do not obstinately plug our ears and shut our eyes to the Word of God, regarding salvation or any other divine instruction; respecting Matt. 13:14, Clarke writes: "...God will not force you to receive the salvation which is offered."
2. For Unbaptized believers, then, you must hearken to and obey the words of Jesus, Mark 16:16.
3. For baptized believers, we must abide always in the Word of God and repent of our sins when we find ourselves guilty of such, 1 John 2:1; Acts 8:22.

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# A Virgin Shall Conceive

## Isaiah 7:14

**Thesis:** To examine one of the most important Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (Jesus Christ), whereby we can re-affirm our confidence in pure Christianity.

**Song:** *What a Savior*

### **Introduction:**

1. The prophet Isaiah lived and prophesied about 700 years prior to the opening events of the New Testament.
2. One of the most outstanding Old Testament prophecies came from his inspired pen respecting the Virgin Birth of the Messiah, Isa. 7:14.
3. That Isa. 7:14 pertains specifically and exclusively to the Virgin Birth of Jesus of Nazareth (our Messiah, the Son of God, the Christ) is inarguably confirmed in the New Testament Scriptures, Matt. 1:22-23.
4. The singular event of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, prophesied 700 years before it occurred, firmly validates the Bible as the inspired Word of God and inarguably establishes the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, Anointed One or Christ.

### **Body:**

- I. **Isaiah 7:14 specifically and exclusively predicted the Virgin Birth of the Son of God about 700 years before it occurred.**
  - A. The word “sign” here means “a signal...beacon...evidence” (*Biblesoft’s*) respecting the arrival of the Son of God on earth, and it is sometimes translated as “a token” or “miracles.”
  - B. The word “virgin” is of special importance in this prophecy.
    1. First, note that the original language reads “**the** virgin,” which Coffman avows could only refer to “the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.”
    2. *Keil & Delitzsch* note that the Hebrew word translated “virgin” could not have referred to the prophet Isaiah’s wife of many years.
    3. The Virgin Birth was God’s vehicle to fulfill his promise to David respecting the perpetuation of his

kingdom: “God had guaranteed the perpetuity of David’s throne in the person of Messiah, David’s seed (2 Sam 7:16: cf. Ethan’s psalm, Ps 89:35-37; 132:11)” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

4. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* note that the word used for “virgin” in the original means “to lie hid, virgins being closely kept from men’s gaze in their parents’ custody.”

C. Especially critics of the Bible or critics of the inspiration of the Bible are quick to negate if they can the translation of the Hebrew word *almah* as “virgin.”

A fact apparently unknown to critical enemies of God’s Word is that the true meaning of any word must finally be determined, not by any etymological data, but by the USAGE of it. Look at the following: hamburgers are not made out of ham... (Coffman).

1. Every usage of the Hebrew word *almah* in the Old Testament refers to a virgin.

This word was never used of a married woman, nor of an immoral woman. This word occurs six times in Biblical passages in addition to the one before us. In every instance, the word refers to an unmarried, chaste woman. (1) In Gen. 24:43, Rebekah is called [almah], and also [bethuwlah], a woman whom no man had known (Gen. 24:16). (2) In Exo. 2:8, Moses’ sister, Miriam, in her childhood is called [almah]. (3) and (4) Twice in the Song of Solomon it refers to a chorus of young women (Cant. 1:3) distinguished from Solomon’s queens and concubines (Cant. 6:8). (5) And in Prov. 30:19 it refers to a maiden in contrast to an adulterous woman. (6) In Ps. 68:25 the word describes the damsels who played timbrels in the sanctuary; and any assumption that those damsels were anything but virgins is impossible. (Homer Halley qtd. in Coffman)

2. James Burton Coffman also notes that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made in 285 B.C.) confirms beyond any doubt that Isa. 7:14 meant “virgin” when those eminent Jewish translators chose a Greek word that can only mean “virgin.”

The Jewish scholars, who prepared that translation, used the term *parthenos* to render the Hebrew ‘*almah*, and they could scarcely be accused of endeavoring to create a fictitious support for a virgin birth of Jesus. Rather, they were intending to give the true **meaning** of the word as used in Hebrew by Isaiah. (*Gospel of Matthew* 39)

3. B.C. Goodpasture ably refutes the claims of critics that another Hebrew word other than *almah* rather means “virgin.”

They claim the word “*bethulah*” would have been used if a real virgin had been meant. It is a fact, notwithstanding, that “*bethulah*,” which is said to mean a real virgin, is actually used of a bride lamenting over her husband in Joel 1:8; while the word “*almah*,” which critics say may not mean a real virgin, is used in Isa. 7:14 and in six other places (Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; Psm. 68:26; Prov. 30:19; S. of Sol. 1:3; S. of Sol. 6:8), and always in the sense of an unmarried maiden. (qtd. in Elkins 97)

4. The inspired Gospel writer Matthew selected a word from the Greek when quoting Isa. 7:14 and applying it to Jesus Christ that can only mean “virgin”; “...Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy applying it to Christ and uses the Greek *parthenos*, ‘virgin’ (Cates 310).
- D. The phrase in Isa. 7:14 “shall call his name” in its context simply refers to the normal practice anciently of mothers naming their children: “It was usual for ‘mothers’ to give names to their children; Gen 4:1; 19:37; 29:32; 30:18” (Barnes).
  - E. The name “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us,” corresponds to the fact of God being literally with mankind through the Incarnation of Christ.
  - F. The coming of the Messiah, i.e. through the Virgin Birth, was the subject of interest and inquiry throughout the ages from the time of Isaiah’s 7:14 prophecy, 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

**II. Matthew 1:22-23 conclusively and without reservation confirms the Virgin Birth of the Son of God in complete fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.**

- A. Any obscurity attached to the original prophecy in Isa. 7:14 evaporates with the inspired New Testament commentary of Matt. 1:22-23.
1. The best and infallible commentary on the meaning of Old Testament prophecy is the inspired New Testament, and Isa. 7:14 and Matt. 1:22-23 are evidence to this.
  2. “The inspired authority of Matt 1:23 decides the Messianic reference; for it cannot be a mere ‘accommodation’ of Scripture, since the Evangelist saith, ‘that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of, the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin,’ etc.” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).
  3. That Matthew quoted Isaiah and applied Isa. 7:14 to Jesus Christ is indisputable, and Barnes estimates that Isaiah spoke the prophecy about 740 years before its fulfillment.
- B. The use of the word “virgin” in Matt. 1:23 is significant beyond compare.
1. The Greek actually reads “the virgin” with the definite article.
  2. If it were not singular enough that a virgin should conceive without male participation, the singularity of the Virgin Birth is the more highlighted regarding its singularity by use of the definite article, i.e. the Virgin Birth would only occur once.
  3. “Note the demonstrative force of the article, pointing to a particular person. Not, ‘some virgin or other’” (*Vincent’s*).
  4. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* writes respecting the definite article: “[I]t should be ‘the virgin,’ exactly as in the Hebrew; meaning that particular virgin destined to this unparalleled distinction.”
  5. Mary herself confirms the definition of “virgin” Matthew employed in 1:23 by her testimony respecting her virginity, Luke 1:34.
  6. Hence, the Virgin Birth was the first miracle in which

Jesus Christ was directly involved respecting his birth and ministry.

- C. The name Immanuel applied to the Christ is especially heartening to the children of God.
  - 1. Immanuel is translated for us in Matt. 1:23 as “God with us.”
  - 2. *Vincent’s Word Studies* comments that though Jesus Christ has Ascended back to heaven, he is still with us in a very real sense, Matt. 28:20.
  - 3. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* comments that the sense of the designation “Immanuel” to Jesus is “God manifested in the flesh.”

**III. In the strongest terms, both testaments of the Bible in concert confirm that Deity came to earth through the Virgin Birth to save humanity from the consequences of sin, Luke 19:10; John 3:17.**

- A. Some Scripture is supplemental or complements more direct references to the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.
  - 1. The first Messianic prophecy, Gen. 3:15, alludes to the Virgin Birth: “Since normally the Bible and even the writings of men refer to offspring as the ‘seed of man,’ this reference becomes highly significant. There is no reference here to the involvement of the human male. This is the first prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah” (Kamp 429).
  - 2. Messianic passages that concern the lineage through King David allude to the Virgin Birth, the vehicle by which God’s Messiah (his Son) became a descendant of David, Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-12.
  - 3. The apostle John referred to the Virgin Birth when he spoke of the Son of God coming to the earth, John 1:14.
  - 4. The apostle Paul in Gal. 4:4 alluded to the Virgin Birth in concert with Gen. 3:15, cf. Jer. 31:22.
  - 5. Paul also clearly embraced the Virgin Birth as the means by which God was revealed to mankind in the first century, 1 Tim. 3:16.
- B. One cannot be a Christian without accepting the Virgin Birth, because it was through the utility of the Virgin Birth that the Son of God came into the world, Isa. 7:14; Matt.

1:22-23; John 20:30-31; 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7.

**Conclusion:**

1. The prophecy and subsequent fulfillment of the Virgin Birth of the Messiah substantiates the validity of the Bible and Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity.
2. Consequently, mankind has every needed incentive to abide in the doctrine of Christ whereby he can participate in his soul's salvation, 2 John 9.
3. Therefore, faithful Christians have cause for legitimate hope respecting the coming eternity beyond this life.

**Invitation:**

1. Faithful Christians know that they will receive a crown of life, 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10.
2. To become a Christian, do what Jesus commanded in Mark 16:16.
3. As Christians, when we sin, we can get back on track to receive a crown of life through repentance and prayer, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# A Stone of Stumbling

## Isaiah 8:14-15

**Thesis:** To examine the dual role of Jesus Christ respectively toward the obedient and the disobedient by examining the illustration in Isa. 8:14-15 and similar passages in both testaments of the Bible.

**Song:** *Rock of Ages*

### **Introduction:**

1. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the obedient, Heb. 5:9.
2. Yet at the same time, Jesus Christ is the executioner of harsh punishment to the disobedient, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.
3. Isa. 8:14-15 some 700 years before the ministry of Jesus Christ used an illustration to teach that dual role of our Lord toward humanity.
4. The illustration of our Savior being a stone that punishes the disobedient whereas the obedient are rescued appears in both testaments of the Bible.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's look more closely at Isa. 8:14-15.**

- A. First, God is willing to provide salvation to mankind.
  1. The word "sanctuary" in Isa. 8:14 "means an asylum, or a refuge, to which one might flee in case of danger, and be safe" (Clarke).
  2. God has always been willing to be man's refuge, Prov. 18:10; Psa. 46:1.
  3. The longsuffering of God in our present age is attributed to God's desire that mankind be saved rather than eternally lost, 2 Pet. 3:9-11.
- B. A rock, mountain, etc. is used often in Scripture to represent Deity, Dan. 2:34, 45.
  1. God is mankind's Rock on whom he can rely for defense, even "the Rock of his salvation," Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30-31; Psa. 28:1; 31:2; 42:9.
  2. Lamentably, God's own people often stumbled over the Rock of their salvation: "a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence," cf. 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 9:32-33.
- C. Rather than an Agent for the salvation or refuge of the

ancient Israelites (i.e. the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah), Deity became to them “a trap and a snare” (NKJV).

- D. Isa. 8:15 emphasizes the demise of disobedient Israelites and adds that they shall “be taken.”
  - 1. The Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. and took many of the survivors as prisoners to foreign lands.
  - 2. The Babylonians defeated the southern kingdom of Judah in 587 B.C. and took many of the survivors as prisoners to Babylon.

## II. The Jews of the Old Testament as well as in the first century rejected Deity and suffered rebuff for it, Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42-44.

- A. Isa. 28:16 uses an illustration of the Messiah or Savior being a foundation stone or “chief corner stone.”
  - 1. The illustration refers to the ordinary practice of constructing a stone building, 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9; Job 38:6.
  - 2. The illustration in Isa. 28:16 means that despite the rejection of Jesus Christ, our foundation or corner stone, he is our Messiah and founder of his kingdom or church, Matt. 21:42-44.
  - 3. The apostle Paul also referred to Jesus Christ as the “chief corner stone” of the New Testament kingdom or church, Eph. 2:20.
- B. God’s provision for the establishment of the Messianic kingdom was already initiated in Isaiah’s day.
  - 1. Butler comments about the Hebrew word for “lay” in Isa. 28:16:

The Hebrew word *yisad* (lay) is past tense. God had already started the foundation. It was the Messianic promise. It was started at least as early as David (cf. 2 Sam. 7: 12ff. The completion of the foundation would be found in the Messiah Himself (cf. Mt. 21:42, 44; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20; I Pet, 2:4-6). (69)

- 2. Prediction with God is as certain as a present or past event is with us.
- 3. Imagine the care and solidity of a foundation which

began to be laid about a 1,000 years before the superstructure was added, i.e. from the time of King David to the first century A.D.

- C. A sure foundation, often cut into or laid upon bedrock, is preferable for the construction of a durable structure, rather than a soft foundation such as sand, Matt. 7:24-27.
  - 1. First century Jews were essentially building on sand when they rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and their Savior, Acts 4:11-12.
  - 2. First century Jews proceeded to build without the sure foundation by building their own religion through modifications of God-given Judaism, Matt. 15:9, 13; Rom. 10:1-3.
- D. Isa. 28:16 also describes the Messiah as “a tried stone,” meaning that there was no uncertainty as to the stability of the Messiah as the unmoveable foundation, i.e. for the establishment of the then future New Testament kingdom or church.
  - 1. Albert Barnes writes: “Such a reference also exactly suits the connection. The stability of the kingdom of God on earth rests on the Messiah.”
  - 2. *Wycliffe* pens that “tried stone” was “one with no faults or cleavages,” hence completely suitable for being the foundation.
  - 3. The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* commentary relates that Jesus Christ was tried “both by the devil (Luke 4:1-13) and by men (Luke 20:1-38), and even by God (Matt 27:46): a stone of tested solidity to bear the vast superstructure of man’s redemption.”
- E. Our Savior is also illustrated by reference to “a **precious** corner stone.”
  - 1. Comparably, the everlasting kingdom, the church, is described as magnificent in **precious** or expensive foundation stones, Rev. 21:19.
  - 2. Jesus Christ is the foundation, 1 Cor. 3:11.
  - 3. Faithful Christians are described as “lively stones” in God’s “spiritual house,” 1 Pet. 2:5.
- F. The stumbling of the Jews over the Messiah hastened the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles.
  - 1. The apostle Paul accused the Jews of the very crime of

rejecting their Savior, whereupon he took the Gospel to the Gentiles, Acts 13:45-48.

2. The apostle Peter explained that the reluctance of the Jews to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior was offset by the acknowledgement of our Lord as Savior by many Gentiles, 1 Pet. 2:4-10.

### **III. Jesus Christ remains a stone of stumbling today to most of this world's population.**

- A. Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling to proponents of world religions other than Christianity, such as Judaism.
  1. Lamentably, most people of Jewish ancestry have never acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God.
  2. For the most part, Jews today who have any interest in religion are doing exactly what Paul accused his countrymen of doing in his day, Rom. 10:1-3.
  3. Rather than being religious at all, secular Judaism or merely awareness of a Jewish heritage (i.e. recognition of their ethnicity) best describes a large number of Jews today.
- B. Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling to proponents of several additional world religions other than Christianity.
  1. World religions other than Christianity include the Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, witchcraft, Confucianism, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, voodoo, Bahai plus numerous more.
  2. While all world religions other than Christianity are spiritually detrimental to their followers, especially Islam poses a real physical threat to all non adherents, e.g. the current brand of terrorism that has been ongoing in recent history for over the last 30 years, only recently realized (but not fully) for the serious danger it poses to the rest of the world.
- C. Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling as evidenced by the vast and diverse denominational world.
  1. Many hundreds of major denominations exist in distinction from each other with literally thousands of divisive subsets within those denominations.
  2. Each of these thousands of so-called Christian churches owns its own version of Jesus Christ, its own

creed, essentially its own God and its own unique perception of eternity.

- D. Unfortunately, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling to many Christians, members of the Lord's church, today as well.
1. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because our Lord accepts all races of humanity into his church, Mark 16:15-16.
  2. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because of what he teaches about marriage, divorce and remarriage, Matt. 19:9.
  3. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because he expects us to worship with other Christians every first day of the week, 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2.
  4. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because he requires of us godly, Christian living, Rom. 12:1-2; Titus 2:12; Phil. 4:8.
  5. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because he requires of us godly Christian service, Titus 2:14; Jam. 2:17, 20, 26.
  6. For some, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling because he expects us to obey him, Rom. 6:17.

**Conclusion:**

1. In our age, Jesus Christ is the Savior of the obedient, Heb. 5:9.
2. Yet at the same time, Jesus Christ will be the executioner of harsh punishment to the disobedient, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

**Invitation:**

1. Whereas Jesus Christ remains a stone of stumbling to most of the world, may our Savior not be a stone of stumbling to us.
2. However, Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling to those who reject his solution for the sin problem mankind experiences, Mark 16:16.
3. Jesus Christ is also a stone of stumbling for erring Christians who continue in their sins rather than repenting and praying for forgiveness, Acts 8:22.

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# God Is My Salvation

## Isaiah 12:2

**Thesis:** To emphasize that to Almighty God only can we turn for salvation from sin.

**Song:** *Jesus Saves*

### **Introduction:**

1. Mankind early turned from God to alternative plans from divine instruction, e.g. Adam and Eve turned their attention from God to Satan in the Garden.
2. Prone to worship, yet remiss in continuing to recognize the Sovereignty of God alone, turned to worship idols, Rom. 1:22-23; Isa. 44:14-17.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Isaiah 12:2 offers the refreshing assurance that God is prepared to save wayward humanity.**

- A. "Trust" in Isa. 12:2 means to "be confident or sure" (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. Our salvation is certain or guaranteed by God.
  2. Judah in Isaiah's day trusted in salvation from their enemies through alliances with other nations, Isa. 31:1.
  3. We must be careful not to make the same error of those Israelites, looking to the wrong source for salvation.
- B. The words "be afraid" in Isa. 12:2 mean "to be startled (by a sudden alarm)" (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. There is no reason to be alarmed at come what may when God sees to our salvation.
  2. Faithful children of God can have a boldness respecting their salvation, Heb. 4:16.
  3. We can "know that we know" our Savior by keeping his commandments, 1 John 2:3.
- C. The words "Lord Jehovah" comes from a contraction of "Jehovah" and the full word "Jehovah" together, for the purpose of emphasis.
  1. This speaks to the singularity of salvation's source, Almighty God.
  2. Scripture throughout attributes salvation to God, Exod.

15:2; Psa. 118:14.

3. Similarly, Jesus Christ is identified as “the author of eternal salvation,” Heb. 5:9; 9:28.

## **II. Salvation applied to various circumstances in the Bible.**

- A. Often salvation pertained to physical victory or deliverance from a particular affliction.
  1. God provided salvation to the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing Egyptian army, Exod. 14:13.
  2. Later, God provided salvation from the heathen, 1 Chron. 16:35.
- B. The salvation in which we ought to be primarily interested today is salvation from sin.
  1. That salvation is exclusively through Jesus Christ, Acts 4:12.
  2. That salvation is for every race of humanity throughout the world, Acts 13:47; Mark 16:15-16; Titus 2:11; Jude 3.
- C. Salvation from sin cannot be found through the manmade plans of humanity.
  1. Denominationalism with its thousands of schemes of redemption cannot really save.
  2. Manmade religion, even if it is an altered form of God-given religion, is worthless and salvation-less, Matt. 15:9, 13.
  3. Manmade systems of righteousness cannot save, Rom. 10:1-3.
- D. The salvation from sin that we seek can only be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  1. The Gospel is the power of God toward salvation Rom. 1:16.
  2. It is the Gospel of salvation, Eph. 1:13.
  3. We must study it and apply it to ourselves to have salvation, 2 Tim. 3:15.
  4. Salvation requires human participation, not unresponsiveness and indifference, Phil. 2:12.
  5. The result of applying the Christian faith to our lives is salvation, 1 Pet. 1:9-10.

### **Conclusion:**

1. God’s intention is for mankind to be saved, 1 Thess. 5:9.
2. Jesus Christ initiated the introduction of salvation during his

earthly ministry, Heb. 2:3.

3. Jesus, then, became the “captain” of our salvation, Heb. 2:10.
4. The apostle Paul was one in the first century who labored tirelessly so that others could realize salvation for themselves, 2 Tim. 2:10.
5. The longsuffering of God, delaying the commencement of eternity for humanity, is owing to extended opportunities for men to be saved, 2 Pet. 3:15.

**Invitation:**

1. Now is the time for man to interest himself in the salvation of his soul from sins, Rom. 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 6:2.
2. Godly sorrow for sin leads to repentance, followed by salvation, 2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 2:38.

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# Weak Hands and Feeble Knees

## Isaiah 35:3

**Thesis:** Almighty God is the only resource by whom we can strengthen weak hands and feeble knees (spiritually).

### **Introduction:**

1. Isaiah 35:3 uses the illustration of a weakened physical condition to represent the spiritual frailty of the nation of Judah.
2. As a weakened physical body may need rehabilitation and a steady diet of the right kind of food, the Israelites in Isaiah's day needed spiritual rehabilitation (rehab) and the right kind of spiritual food.
3. Of course, the same principle still applies today.
  - a. Souls need spiritual rehab, 1 Tim. 4:8.
  - b. Souls also need the right kind of spiritual food, 1 Pet. 2:2.
  - c. Only then can the child of God be spiritually strong, no longer characterized spiritually as having weak hands and feeble knees, Heb. 5:12-14.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's look a little more closely at Isaiah 35:3.**

- A. Generally, through the prophet Isaiah, God called upon the nation of Judah to replace its despair with courage.
  1. In the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, the Assyrian King Sennacherib conquered 46 cities, numerous smaller villages of Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem, driving out of those communities 200,150 people (Halley 286).
  2. Jerusalem was spared by the divine intervention of God when he sent an angel of death into the Assyrian camp, killing 185,000 soldiers, 2 Kings 19:35-36.
  3. Consequently, the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem had been in great despair, but now God through the prophet Isaiah called upon them to rebound in courage and hope.
  4. Respecting Isa. 35:3, *Keil & Delitzsch* comments: "Those who have become weak in faith, hopeless and

despairing, are to cheer up; and the stronger are to tell such of their brethren as are perplexed and timid, to be comforted now: for Jehovah is coming...”

5. Similar language appears elsewhere in both testaments of the Bible, Job 4:3-4; Heb 12:12; Ezek. 7:17; 21:7.
- B. God through the prophet Isaiah gave the despondent Israelites two reasons to cheer their spirits: physical release from oppression then and the promise of the coming Messiah in the future.

The sense is, strengthen and sustain the feeble and the desponding by the promised blessings; by the assurances (Isa 34) that all the enemies of God and his people will be destroyed; and that he will manifest himself as their Protector, and send upon them the promised blessings. Or it may be regarded as addressed to the officers and ministers of religion when these blessings should have come; and as being an exhortation to them to make use of the influences, the promises, and the consolations which would attend the coming of the Messiah, to strengthen the feeble, and confirm those who were faint-hearted. (Barnes)

1. Butler comments respecting Isaiah Chapter 35: “This chapter finds its ultimate fulfillment in the messianic kingdom (the church)” (196).
2. More extensively, Butler compares Isaiah 35 with Hebrews 12.

Verses 3-4 are apparently paraphrased in Hebrews 12:12-13. Perhaps the idea of Isaiah in this whole section (vs. 1-7) is appropriated by the Hebrews 12:12-13 passage. Hebrews 12 is the chapter in which the Mosaic dispensation is contrasted with the Christian dispensation (Zion) and the Hebrew Christians are exhorted to cling to the kingdom which cannot be shaken (Christian) because this was God’s goal in the Old Testament. This seems to indicate the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews is saying the Christian dispensation is the fulfillment of the promises made in Isaiah 35, and “therefore” the messianic age is the point upon which God’s people are to focus for

“strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees.” (198)

3. Certainly for we who live thousands of years this side of Isa. 35:3, our focus for strengthening weak hands and feeble knees pertains to the Messiah who came in the first century A.D. and who is coming again.
- C. God conveyed through Isaiah this twofold consolation through an illustration of a weakened body.

Strength resides mainly in the arms, and in the lower limbs, or the knees. If these are feeble, the whole frame is feeble. Fear relaxes the strength of the arms, and the firmness of the knees; and the expressions ‘weak hands,’ and ‘feeble knees,’ become synonymous with saying, of a timid, fearful, and desponding frame of mind. Such were to be strengthened by the assurance of the favor of God, and by the consolations which would flow from the reign of the Messiah. The Jews, who looked abroad upon the desolations of their country, were to be comforted by the hope of future blessings; those who lived in those future times were to be consoled by the assurances of the favor of God through the Messiah (Barnes)

## **II. Left to his own devices, mankind cannot spiritually strengthen weak hands and feeble knees.**

- A. Historically, mankind has wandered away from God, in a sense spiritually developing weak hands and feeble knees.
1. Mankind through the persons of Adam and Eve first wandered from God in the Garden of Eden, Gen. 3.
  2. Cain notoriously continued the family tradition of sin when he murdered his brother Abel, Gen. 4.
  3. Mankind steadily steeped itself more in sin until God refused to tolerate sinful humanity any longer, hence destroying “the world that then was” in the worldwide flood of Noah’s day, 2 Pet. 3:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:20; Gen. 6-8.
  4. The Bible is filled with instances of sin, even by those who profess to be holy worshippers of God, Rom. 3:23.
- B. Utter futility and hopelessness results from mankind’s

attempt at self-reliance.

1. Mankind has always been slow to realize that he cannot save himself apart from God, Jer. 10:23; Prov. 20:24.
2. Even God's special people have often sought to rely on themselves rather than relying on God through his divine instruction, Rom. 10:1-3.
3. The end result of self reliance is sin and its consequence, Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
4. However, our loving God has always been open to souls who come to their senses and repent of their obstinate waywardness, Job 33:27-28; Luke 15:11-32.

### **III. Mankind can only strengthen weak hands and feeble knees in a spiritual sense through God.**

- A. Historically, mankind has only strengthened weak hands and feeble knees spiritually by appealing to God.
  1. The phrase "we have sinned" appears 23 times in the Bible, Dan. 9:5.
  2. The phrase "I have sinned" appears 19 times in the Bible, Psa. 41:4; Luke 15:18, 21.
  3. There is hope only when people return to God, Neh. 1:6-9.
  4. For us, not without Jesus Christ, but only through Jesus Christ can we in essence strengthen weak hands and feeble knees, Phil. 4:13.
- B. God, through the Bible, promises strength spiritually not otherwise attainable.
  1. Part of God's plan to strengthen his people includes stronger Christians strengthening weaker Christians, Rom. 15:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; Gal 6:1-2.
  2. In addition, each child of God has the responsibility to participate in his own strengthening, Heb. 12:12.
  3. Christians must avail themselves of the proper spiritual diet to be strengthened, 1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14.
  4. Christians must exercise themselves to have spiritually strengthened hands and knees, 1 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 5:14.

### **Conclusion:**

1. We can rely on Jesus Christ for spiritually strong hands and knees, Phil. 4:13.
2. As Isa. 35:3 intimates, our hope rests on our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**Invitation:**

1. Only through Jesus Christ can we have boldness before the very throne of God, Heb. 4:16.
2. However, God's grace and mercy only saves the obedient, Heb. 5:9; Mark 16:16.
3. Further, God's grace and mercy only saves erring Christians who repent, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# Highway of Holiness

## Isaiah 35:8

**Thesis:** Both testaments emphasize that there is but one way that leads to eternal habitation with God—the Highway of Holiness.

**Song:**

### **Introduction:**

1. Both testaments emphasize that there is but one way that leads to eternal habitation with God—the Highway of Holiness, Isa. 35:8.
2. John the Baptist, likewise, made a spiritual highway preparing for the ministry of the Messiah, Isa. 40:3-4; Mal. 3:1; Matt. 3:1-3.
3. Jesus spoke of a narrow way versus a broad way, each leading to different spiritual destinations, Matt. 7:13-14.
4. Every soul would do well to travel the high road to heaven!

### **Body:**

#### **I. Let's look a little more closely at Isaiah 35:8.**

- A. The word “highway” means “a thoroughfare (as turnpiked)” (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. Albert Barnes describes “highway” as “a RAISED way and would be expressed by our word ‘causeway’ or ‘turnpike.’ It was such a way as was usually made for the march of armies by removing obstructions, filling valleys, etc.”
  2. Our interstate highways in many parts of the country generally involved a highway raised beyond the surrounding terrain, and where necessary, mountains are lowered and valleys are raised.
  3. There is a superhighway to heaven that only the righteous can travel, Isa. 49:11; 62:10.
- B. The word “way” in Isa. 35:8 means “a road (as trodden); figuratively, a course of life or mode of action” (*Biblesoft's*).
  1. The manner of one's life who is on God's highway of holiness differs from the way other people live their lives, 1 Pet. 2:9.
  2. In our age, then, Christians are supposed to act like Christians, Eph. 5:8.
  3. The elevated spiritual highway of holiness is lighted

with God's Word so we can see where we walk, 1 John 1:7.

- C. "Holiness" means "a sacred place or thing" (*Biblesoft's*).
  - 1. Holy things are set apart for a special use.
  - 2. The highway of holiness is set apart for special use by the children of God to make their journey to God's heavenly home.
  - 3. Faithful children of God who travel along the highway of holiness likewise are set apart.
- D. "Unclean" means "foul in a relig. sense" (*Biblesoft's*).
  - 1. The ungodly have no interest in traveling on God's highway of holiness.
  - 2. There is no compatibility between the religiously foul and God's highway of holiness.
- E. The word "fools" here means "silly" (*Biblesoft's*).
  - 1. The highway of holiness will be so obvious that even simple persons cannot mistake it.
  - 2. Further, God will guide travelers along the highway of holiness so that none need stray from it.
  - 3. If anyone once on the highway of holiness fails to reach the journey's end, it will neither be because the highway is poorly marked nor because there is no guide along the way, John 14:6.

## **II. Appropriately, Christianity or the Lord's church is spoken of in Scripture as "the way," Acts 9:2.**

- A. The highway of holiness is not only ignored by most of humanity, it is sometimes the object of scorn, Matt. 7:13-14; Acts 19:9.
  - 1. The world denies that God's highway of holiness is the only way that leads to heaven where God is, Acts 19:23.
  - 2. The world is painfully aware of God's highway of holiness, Acts 24:22.
- B. There are **not** many paths through the forest of life, all of which lead to the clearing of heaven.
  - 1. Though all roads may have led to Rome in its heyday, all roads do not lead to heaven, Matt. 7:13-14.
  - 2. Manmade religion, or even God-given religion altered, cannot compare with the way which is exclusively through Jesus Christ, John 14:6.

3. Manmade and man-altered divine religion are dead ends spiritually, Rom. 10:1-3; Matt. 15:9, 13.

**Conclusion:**

1. The reference to a superhighway is figurative and spiritual.
2. “This passage is not referring to any kind of an elevated roadway through a desert, but to the way of Salvation in Jesus Christ. He alone is ‘the way’” (Coffman).
3. Clearly, there is a “way of salvation,” Acts 16:17.
4. It is “the way of the Lord” or “the way of God,” Acts 18:25-26.
5. It is “the way of truth,” 2 Pet. 2:2.

**Invitation:**

1. To Jesus, then, one must turn for guidance respecting salvation, Mark 16:16.
2. For erring Christians who have departed from “the way of righteousness,” repentance and prayer rather than being baptized again takes care of their sin problem, 2 Pet. 2:21; Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# The Day the Sundial Went Backward

## Isaiah 38:1-8; 2 Kings 20:1-11

**Thesis:** To discern principles from the Old Testament that Christians need to instill in their lives today.

### **Introduction:**

1. Today's sermon is drawn from Isaiah 38:1-8 and 2 Kings 20:1-11, and it is entitled, "The Day the Sundial Went Backward," though it could as easily be subtitled, "Set Thine House in Order."
2. It is our purpose on this occasion to discern principles from this Old Testament account that Christians need to instill in their lives today.

### **Body:**

#### **I. First, let's consider the background relative to the context under consideration.**

- A. Israel grew to the size of a small nation as foreigners in Egypt.
  1. Joseph who had become second highest ruler in Egypt invited his father Jacob (who God renamed Israel) and his brothers to settle in the part of Egypt called Goshen.
  2. Many years later, and after the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites, Moses led the little nation in the Exodus, Red Sea crossing and protracted wilderness wandering up the edge of Canaan.
  3. Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan, wresting it by conquest from its inhabitants.
  4. For hundreds of years following the death of Joshua, Israel was guided periodically by a series of judges.
  5. Samuel, the last judge, reluctantly appointed a king and Israel adopted monarchy as its form of government.
- B. The united monarchy of Israel lasted 120 years from 1095 B.C. to 975 B.C.
  1. Kings Saul, David and Solomon each reigned for 40

- years.
2. Due to disobedience, God took the right to be king from King Saul, his tribe (Benjamin) and family, and gave the dynasty to King David and his descendants from the tribe of Judah.
  3. After the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam became King, but because of his harshness the kingdom split into two nations.
- C. From that time, the nation of Israel represented the ten northern tribes, and the nation of Judah represented the two southern tribes.
1. The nation of Israel launched immediately into widespread idolatry when its first king, Jeroboam, erected golden calves for worship in the cities of Dan and Bethel.
  2. King after king in the northern kingdom of Israel multiplied idolatry in the land as well as either committed or permitted great wickedness.
  3. After a time, the nation of Judah likewise introduced idolatry into its land and permitted much wickedness to flourish.
- D. Almighty God punished both wayward nations of Israelites by sending other nations against them.
1. The nation of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C.
  2. After the time of Hezekiah, God permitted the Babylonians to conquer Judah in 587 B.C.
- E. However, the context under consideration today corresponds to the time immediately following the Assyrian defeat of the nation of Israel.
1. Assyria not only conquered Israel, the sister nation to Judah, Assyria was attempting to conquer the nation of Judah as well.
  2. Assyria had conquered 46 cities, numerous smaller villages of Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem, driving out of those communities 200,150 people (Halley 286).
  3. Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem and would have overrun it as well except for God's divine intervention.
  4. Jerusalem was spared by the divine intervention of God when he sent an angel of death into the Assyrian camp, killing 185,000 soldiers, 2 Kings 19:35-36.

5. It was about this time that Hezekiah was dying per the context of Isaiah 38:1-8 and 2 Kings 20:1-11.

## II. Second, let's look more closely at the texts that record the event in Hezekiah's life of the shadow going backward.

- A. Isaiah delivered the harsh and blunt message to King Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live," 2 Kings 20:1; Isa. 38:1.
  1. The illness from which Hezekiah was dying may well have been leprosy when his ailment is compared with other passages, Lev. 13, especially verse 18.
  2. The accompanying physical activity to the miraculous cure appears in Isa. 38:21.
- B. Upon receiving news from God through the prophet that he would die, Hezekiah immediately prayed.
  1. It was a sorrowful prayer accompanied by many tears.
  2. Hezekiah represented himself as one with a "perfect heart" and who obeyed God.
  3. The word "perfect" in this place means "complete...especially friendly" (*Biblesoft's*); Hezekiah's heart was completely dedicated to God and his heart was especially friendly toward God.

Hezekiah surely does not claim for himself sinlessness. His claim is that of a life based upon the truth as he knew it from God and a complete (perfect) heart's motivation to do what was good in God's sight. (Butler 274)

4. In the case of Hezekiah, God answered his prayer and promised to add 15 years to his life.
- C. Other than the shock, why would Hezekiah question God's declaration respecting the timing of Hezekiah's death?

But why did not Hezekiah resign himself to what apparently was God's will—his immediate death? Hezekiah was only 39 or 40 years old when this terminal illness struck him. Manasseh was not to be born for three more years (Manasseh was 12 years old when Hezekiah died at the age of 54; see II Kings 21: 1; II Chron. 33:1). It was contrary to all Hezekiah believed concerning the perpetuation of the dynasty of David (which God had certainly promised) that he should die

without a successor to the throne of David! It was also considered by any Jewish male to be a sign of Divine disfavor to be cut off in the midst of one's life without a male child to carry on the family name (Job 15:32; 22:15-16; Psa. 55:23; Prov. 10:27; Eccl. 7:17). (Butler 275)

1. Summarized, Hezekiah was as concerned about God's announced plan respecting a Messiah as anything else: "Hezekiah at that time had no son (39:7; cf. 2 Kings 21:1), and the dynasty of David, in which centered so many Messianic hopes, was seriously threatened" (Robinson 123).
  2. "Hezekiah's concern was well-founded as the genealogical record of Christ proves, 'And Ezekias [Hezekiah] begat Manasses [Manasseh]; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias'" (Matt. 1: 10). (McDade 207-208)
- D. Hezekiah asked for a miracle to assure him that God would really add 15 years to his life, 2 Kings 20:8.
1. The miracle agreed upon and actually selected by Hezekiah was for the shadow on the sundial to retreat 10 degrees or steps, 2 Kings 20:9-11.
  2. The device upon which the shadow was show itself going backward is uncertain: "degrees," KJV; "steps," ASV; "sundial," NKJV.

Josephus thinks these degrees were steps ascending to the palace of Ahaz. The time of day was indicated by the number of steps reached by the shadow. The dial was of such a size and so placed that Hezekiah, when convalescent, could witness the miracle from his chamber. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah; and it is evident from this, that the dial had been introduced by him, and had been used by him to measure time. There is no mention of any instrument for keeping time in the Bible before this, nor is it possible, perhaps, to determine the origin or character of this invention, or to know where Ahaz obtained it. ...The mention of the dial does not occur

before the time of Ahaz, who lived 726 BC... In order to the understanding of this miracle, it is not necessary to be acquainted with the form of the ancient dial. It will be understood by a reference to any dial, and would have been substantially the same, whatever was the form of the instrument. (Barnes)

E. By what means did the sundial go backward?

1. The words "I will bring back" in Isa. 38:8 mean "to turn back" (*Biblesoft's*); the affect of the shadow returning to where it had already been made it appear as though the earth had reversed its revolution.

It is evident that this may have been accomplished in several ways. ...As there is no evidence that the event was observed elsewhere; and as it is not necessary to suppose that the earth was arrested in its motion, and that the whole frame of the universe was adjusted to this change in the movement of the earth, it is most probable that it was an inclination of the rays of the sun; or a miraculous causing of the shadow itself to recede. This is the whole statement of the sacred writer, and this is all that is necessary to be supposed. What Hezekiah desired was a miracle; a sign that he should recover. That was granted. The retrocession of the shadow in this sudden manner was not a natural event. It could be caused only by God; and this was all that was needed. A simple exertion of divine power on the rays of the sun which rested on the dial, deflecting those rays, would accomplish the whole result. It may be added that it is not recorded, nor is it necessary to an understanding of the subject to suppose, that the bending of the rays was permanent, or that so much time was lost. The miracle was instantaneous, and was satisfactory to Hezekiah, though the rays of the sun casting the shadow may have again been soon returned to their regular position, and the shadow restored to the place in which it would have been had it not been interrupted. (Barnes)

In the light of our present information it is impossible to ascertain how many steps or degrees made up this sundial of Ahaz. The markings may have indicated half-hours or even quarter-hours. Nor can we be certain whether this miracle involved an actual reverse rotation of the earth (which might well have occasioned violent geological disturbances), or was caused by some special atmospheric condition involving an unprecedented refraction of the sun's rays. (*Wycliffe*)

The retrogression of the shadow may have been effected by refraction: a cloud denser than the air interposing between the gnomon and dial would cause the phenomenon, which does not take away from the miracle, because God gave him the choice whether the shadow should go forward or back, and regulated the time and place. ...At all events, there is no need for supposing any revolution of the relative positions of the sun and earth, but merely an effect produced on the shadow (2 Kings 20:9-11); that effect was only local, and designed for the satisfaction of Hezekiah...(*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

2. Frankly, other than recognizing that it was a miraculous event, it does not matter how God accomplished the shadow on the sundial or steps going backward.

Thus the miracle, from all the accounts of it, might consist only of the retrogression of the shadow ten degrees, by a simple act of Almighty power, without any medium, or, at most, by that of refracting those rays only which fell upon the dial. It is not said that any time was lost to the inhabitants of the world at large... (*McClintock and Strong*)

### **III. Third, let's consider some principles from the event in Hezekiah's life that is under consideration.**

- A. Every soul who knows the difference between right and wrong needs the blunt instruction that God through the prophet Isaiah gave to King Hezekiah.
  1. "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not

live,” 2 Kings 20:1; Isa. 38:1.

2. There is nothing more important in life than preparing to meet God in Final Judgment, Ecc. 12:13-14; Amos 4:12.
3. Unlike Hezekiah who was given the privilege of knowing he was about to die so he could amend his life, we do not know when we are going to die so that we can amend our lives, Jam. 4:14.
4. Hence, you and I need to be ready at all times to meet God in Judgment, Matt. 24:44; 25:13; Luke 12:40.

Let every reader be here reminded of the uncertainty of this life and the imperative need to “set your house in order. ” ...Too often men and women procrastinate setting themselves in order with God until there is no more time or they are incapable. Now is the time; *Today is the day of salvation!* (Butler 277)

- B. Just as Hezekiah needed comfort in his plight, we need to comfort those who are around us who face great trials in life and death, 2 Cor. 1:3-4.

God told Hezekiah that he should get his house in order and prepare to die; of course the prophet was deeply disturbed (Isa. 38:1-3). Why would he not be? Just as Isaiah came with comfort and reassurance, so do we desperately need to give emotional strength to the dying. (Coats 394)

- C. Just as Hezekiah prayed to God for what from human perspective appeared to be a hopeless circumstance, Christians today need to pray to God.
1. God heard the prayer of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20:5.
  2. Especially in the New Testament, prayer is exemplified and urged frequently, 1 Thess. 5:17.
  3. “As an example in prayer Hezekiah proves that God answers prayer” (McDade 208).
- D. Miracles are still proof that God means what he says, though the miracles on which we rely today are the ones that have already occurred and about which we read in the Bible.
1. Miracles were temporary means by which new revelation (the New Testament) was received and verified, after which miracles would no longer be

needed, 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-14.

2. The miracles with which we need to concern ourselves are recorded in the Bible, John 20:30-31; Heb. 2:3-4.

### **Conclusion:**

1. There is no reason to believe that the sun literally went backward.
  - a. “The ‘sun’ here means, evidently, the sun as it appeared; the rays, or the shining of the sun” (Barnes).
  - b. “When it is stated that ‘the sun returned,’ this does not mean the sun in the heaven, but the sun upon the sun-dial, upon which the illuminated surface moved upwards as the shadow retreated...” (Keil & Delitzsch).
2. More importantly, there are certain principles that we ought to learn and apply to ourselves from the narrative surrounding Hezekiah.
  - a. Each of us needs to set his house in order because sooner or later we will die, Heb. 9:27.
  - b. We need to comfort the dying and others who are afflicted with the comfort with which we are comforted of God.
  - c. We need to appreciate the efficiency of prayer, Luke 18:1; Jam. 5:16.
  - d. The Bible has been validated as God’s divine Word, which rather than adapting as we see fit, we should bring our lives into conformity with it, Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19; Deut. 6:6; Job 23:12; Psa. 119:11; Prov. 4:4.
3. Unfortunately, King Hezekiah did not live in those 15 years added to his life in such a way to show gratitude toward God, 2 Chron. 32:24-26.

### **Invitation:**

1. Have you set your house in order, by obeying the Gospel of Christ?
2. You can set your house in order and prepare for the next world by becoming a Christian, Acts 26:28; Mark 16:16.
3. You can set your house in order and prepare for the next world if you are an unfaithful Christian by repentance and prayer, 1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22.

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# Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord

## Isaiah 40:3-4

**Thesis:** To show the correlation between an Old Testament Messianic prophecy and its fulfillment in the New Testament.

### **Introduction:**

1. The description in Isaiah 40:3-4 resembles the description of the construction of an interstate highway.
  - a. In many parts of the United States, there are plenty of valleys to “be exalted” or lifted (*Biblesoft’s*) as well as many mountains and hills to be lowered, plus crooked places to “be made straight” as well as several “rough places” to be made “smooth” (NKJV).
  - b. Actually, the language of Isaiah 40:3-4 alludes to the common practice anciently of preparing in advance for the travel of a king and his army through rough terrain, but it applies to the ministry of John the Baptist preceding the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah’s language is highly figurative. It represents a band of engineers and workmen preparing the road for their king through a rough, mountainous district. The figure was familiar to the people of the East, and nearly every generation there witnessed such road-making. The haughty Seriramis leveled the mountains before her. Josephus, describing the march of Vespasian, says that there went before him such as were to make the road even and straight, and if it were anywhere rough and hard, to smooth it over, to plane it, and to cut down woods that hindered the march, that the army might not be tired. Some have thought that Isaiah’s prophecy referred primarily to the return of the Jewish captives from Babylon. But it refers far more directly to the ministry of the Baptist; for it is not said that the way was to be prepared for the people, but for Jehovah

himself. It is a beautiful figure, but the real preparation was the more beautiful transformation of repentance. By inducing repentance, John was to prepare the people to receive Jesus and his apostles, and to hearken to their preaching. (McGarvey and Pendleton)

2. Isaiah 40:3-4, though, is not a reference to the literal construction of a highway, but the figure was rather Messianic, speaking of advance preparation to be made for the King of kings, Jesus Christ.
  - a. The inspired writer, Luke, quotes Isaiah 40:3-4 and applies it to the advance preparation that John the Baptist made for the ministry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Luke 3:1-6.
  - b. The ministry of Jesus Christ was to bring salvation to humanity, Luke 3:6.
3. The prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-4 is important enough that it appears in each of the four Gospel records, Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:23.
  - a. The prophecy is summarized in the statement, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”
  - b. John the Baptist, through his preaching, laid the groundwork for the commencement of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

#### **Body:**

#### **I. John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-4 and made preparation for the ministry of Jesus Christ.**

- A. As important as the role of John the Baptist was in preparation for the ministry of Jesus Christ, he shared that role with others.
  1. All the prophets, in a sense, participated in the ongoing preparation of Jewish people for the arrival of the Messiah.
  2. John the Baptist, however, played the pivotal and primary role immediately preceding the arrival of the Messiah and the commencement of his ministry of salvation.

Certainly, all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi were commissioned by this command to “prepare” the way for the coming of the Lord. Unquestionably, a faithful remnant needed to be continually “prepared” so that new generations of a messianic nucleus might be preserved through the centuries from Isaiah to Christ.

But it was John the Baptist who had the climactic job of preparing an *immediate* nucleus for the coming of God in the flesh-Jesus Christ. It was John the Baptist who first immersed men and women in water for repentance unto the remission of sins (Mt. 3:1-2; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:1-3). It was the Immerser who pointed some of his principal disciples to Jesus (Jn. 1:29-51) and these men became apostles, evangelists and missionaries of the Messianic kingdom, the church. (Butler 3: 9)

3. John the Baptist's primary role in preparing the way of the Lord was also foretold in Mal. 4:5-6; Luke 1:17.
- B. As important as John the Baptist was in his ministry, he pales in comparison of the one for whom he made the preparation.
1. *Keil & Delitzsch* note that even the wording of Isa. 40:3-4 emphasizes the message of the crier over the herald himself: "Voice of one crying! Who the crier is remains concealed; his person vanishes in the splendour of his calling, and falls into the background behind the substance of his cry."
  2. Putting the herald in perspective regarding his relationship to the King, *Keil & Delitzsch* note: "The crier is like the outrider of a king, who takes care that the way by which the king is to go shall be put into good condition."
  3. John the Baptist stated that he was not the Messiah and identified the Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ, John 1:19-23, 29-30.
  4. John the Baptist noted that the Messiah's ministry must increase and that his own ministry must decrease, John 3:28, 30.
- C. John the Baptist's role was to cultivate the soil of human hearts prior to the planting of the Gospel by Jesus Christ.
1. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* compare the Isa. 40:3-4 prophecy with the mission of John the Baptist.

Eastern monarchs send heralds before them in a journey, to clear away obstacles, make causeways over valleys, and level hills. So John's duty was to bring back the people to obedience to the law, and to remove

all self-confidence, pride in national privileges, hypocrisy, and irreligion, so that they should be ready for His coming (Mal 4:6; Luke 1:17).

2. The preparation work that John the Baptist did was within the human hearts of his contemporaries, Psa. 10:17.

## II. Jesus Christ fulfilled his ministry respecting the salvation of souls.

- A. The actual forgiveness of sins was unobtainable prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ.
  1. Atonement for sins under Patriarchy and Judaism through animal sacrifices was forgiveness of sins **in prospect** of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
  2. *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* notes, "This atonement was merely typical in the Old Testament sacrifices; real in the one only New Testament sacrifice, Christ Jesus."
  3. Atonement prior to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ necessitated the remembrance of past sins because they had not been actually forgiven yet, Heb. 10:1-4.
  4. Logically, if actual forgiveness of sins were possible without Jesus Christ suffering a vicarious death upon the cross, there would have been no need for Jesus to leave the splendor of heaven and suffer crucifixion on earth.
- B. The purpose for which Jesus Christ came into the world pertained to the salvation of humanity.
  1. The mission of Jesus Christ to save humanity from sins was announced surrounding his birth, Matt. 1:21.
  2. The purpose of which God the Father sent Jesus Christ into the world was for mankind to have the opportunity to be saved, John 3:17.
  3. Jesus acknowledged and accepted the mission of saving humanity from sin, Luke 19:10.
- C. Jesus Christ did his part for the salvation of humanity.
  1. Jesus Christ made of himself the perfect, sinless sacrifice for the forgiveness of mankind's sins, Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:19.
  2. He gave himself as the ransom price paid for the souls of humanity, 1 Tim. 2:6.
  3. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient that the sins

of all humans could be forgiven, 1 John 2:2; 4:14.

### **III. All that remains is for humanity to come to God through Jesus Christ on divine terms.**

- A. The salvation obtainable through Jesus Christ is **not unconditional!**
  - 1. Jesus declared that though he came that mankind could be saved from sin, salvation is not unconditional, John 6:40; Mark 16:16.
  - 2. Summarized, Jesus saves the obedient, Heb. 5:9; Luke 6:46.
  - 3. The disobedient can expect with dread the return of the Lord, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.
- B. Though Jesus Christ made actual salvation from sin possible, mankind must participate in his own salvation.
  - 1. Man must participate in his own salvation, Phil. 2:12.
  - 2. Must one believe the Gospel; yes, John 8:24.
  - 3. Must one repent of sins; yes, Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30.
  - 4. Must one acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; yes, Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37.
  - 5. Must one be immersed in water to receive the forgiveness of sins; yes, Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12.
  - 6. Is baptism the point at which one's sins are removed; yes, Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21.
- C. It is not possible for anyone to **earn** his or her salvation, but souls must **obey** the Gospel in order to be saved.
  - 1. Eternal salvation could only have been earned were a person never to have committed any sins, Rom. 3:23.
  - 2. Sinners under Patriarchy, Judaism or Christianity cannot earn salvation by doing the deeds prescribed in those respective laws, Rom. 3:20.
  - 3. Only through God's grace and mercy can sinners anticipate salvation, Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.
  - 4. Jesus saves the obedient, Heb. 5:9.
  - 5. The faith that saves is an obedient faith, Rom. 5:1; 1:5; 16:26.
  - 6. Souls are "purified" by "obeying the truth," 1 Pet. 1:22.

### **Conclusion:**

- 1. John the Baptist made adequate preparation for the saving ministry

of Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus Christ fulfilled his ministry of salvation.
3. All that remains is for humanity to come to God through Jesus Christ on divine terms.

**Invitation:**

1. Not one soul is saved either against his will or contrary to the revealed will of Jesus Christ.
2. No single verse of Scripture summarizes how salvation is obtained in the Gospel Age better than the brief statement of Jesus Christ in Mark 16:16.
3. Those who sin after becoming Christians must repent and pray to receive forgiveness, Acts 8:22.

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# The Word of Our God Shall Stand Forever

## Isaiah 40:8

**Thesis:** To demonstrate from Scripture that the Word of God is the only thing on which one can always rely.

**Song:** *Give Me the Bible*

### **Introduction:**

1. No one and nothing on this earth is completely reliable, except the Word of God.
2. Spouses, children, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters sometimes falter.
3. Sometimes we fail ourselves, too.
4. Only the Word of God is a sure thing on which we can always rely.
5. Unfortunately, mankind often places his confidence in himself, other people, material wealth, pleasure, etc., none of which is either reliable or durable beyond the present existence.

### **Body:**

#### **I. God's Word is reliable because God himself is reliable.**

- A. God's Word is as durable as God is durable, eternal.
  1. Mankind's word is sometimes worthless because mankind is not always reliable.
  2. Mankind's word is sometimes worthless because being frail he sometimes is incapable of keeping his word.
  3. God, though, is eternal, Psa. 90:2.
- B. Isa. 40:8 is quoted by inspired New Testament writers twice, Jam. 1:10-11; 1 Pet. 1:24-25.
  1. The grass in these and similar passages refers to the temporal nature of mankind's existence on the earth, Psa. 90:6; 103:15-16; Job 14:1-2.
  2. The Word of God, however, which comes forth from eternal God, contrasts to all that is temporal, including ourselves.

#### **II. As God's character is changeless, his Word is likewise changeless and reliable.**

- A. The nature of our eternal God never changes, Heb. 13:8;

Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17.

- B. God's Word is reliable because it is settled in heaven, Psa. 119:89.
- C. God's Word is reliable because it will endure beyond the present world in which we live, Matt. 24:35.
- D. Especially the Word, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is of primary importance because it endures forever, 1 Pet. 1:25.

**Conclusion:**

- 1. On whom or what do you rely in this life?
- 2. If you rely on anything or anyone, including yourself, you will be let down from time to time.
- 3. Only God's Word is reliable and durable enough to lead us successfully through this life into a blissful eternity.
- 4. Of Isa. 40:8, Coffman observed, "It points to the only dependable and certain anchor that men have, namely, the word of the Lord"

**Invitation:**

- 1. This unchangeable, reliable Word of God is the means by which obeying one is born again—saved—can legitimately anticipate spending eternity with God in heaven, 1 Pet. 1:22-25.
- 2. Have you been truly born again, John 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Heb. 10:22; Acts 22:16?
- 3. Are you relying on the durable Word of God, or have you erred from the faith, 1 Tim. 6:10, 21; 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 John 1:9?

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# Seek Ye the Lord While He May be Found

## Isaiah 55:6-9

**Thesis:** To emphasize that mankind must seek God (through his Word) while time remains to be the beneficiary of divine blessings now and forever.

**Song:** *Seek Ye First*

### **Introduction:**

1. When Isaiah served as God's prophet to the nation of Judah, time was running out before God's longsuffering would be replaced with divine punishment.
2. Likewise today, mankind must seek God while opportunities to seek God abound, i.e. before it's too late to seek God.
3. Further, one must seek God where he can be found, i.e. there are some places where one cannot find God.

### **Body:**

- I. **We must seek God while time remains, i.e. before it is too late.**
  - A. Isaiah 55:6-9 is a wonderful text full of principles applicable to humanity in every age, including our own.
  - B. "Seek" calls upon mortals "to acquire experimental knowledge or confidential acquaintance" (*Keil & Delitzsch*) with God.
    1. Adam Clarke quotes another, giving a very interesting perspective of seeking God: "Seek ye the Lord, because he may be found: call upon him, because he is near..."
    2. God wants mankind to find him, Deut. 4:29; Psa. 14:2.
    3. It is natural for mankind to seek God, Job 5:8.
    4. The proper response to the benevolence of God is to seek him (on his terms), Psa. 27:8; Matt. 6:33; Rom. 10:13; Joel 2:32.
  - C. The phrase "while he may be found" indicates that the longsuffering of God is not inexhaustible.
    1. Eventually, the longsuffering of God will cease, 2 Pet. 3:9-10.

2. When either we pass from the scenes of life or when time is no more, it will be too late to seek God.
  3. There is no time like the present for seeking God, Matt. 11:28
- D. The phrase “while he is near” speaks to opportunity to commune with God.
1. God communes and communicates with humanity when the Word of God is preached; “...God comes near to us in the preaching of his word...” (Barnes).
  2. God is near enough to anyone of us any place on the planet, if we will approach God.
  3. God is never nearer than when we seek him through his Word, enact his Word in our lives and pray to him.
- E. “Let the wicked forsake his way” speaks to the necessity of repentance.
1. One simply cannot be a child of God or a faithful child of God while living a sinful, impenitent life.

The first step is for the sinner to forsake his way. He must come to a solemn pause, and resolve to abandon all his transgressions. His evil course; his vices; his corrupt practices; and his dissipated companions, must be forsaken. (Barnes)

2. Turning from sin back to God is a biblical definition of true repentance, Acts 3:19; cf. 2:38.
- F. Reference to “thoughts” identifies the seat of sin lying within the very heart or imagination of mankind.
1. Evil acted out begins by evil conceived in the heart, Gen. 6:5; Matt. 15:19.
  2. In a real sense, we are what we think, Phil. 4:8.
- G. All sinners need to turn from their sins.
1. All sins have the same capacity to condemn souls to an eternal hell, Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8.
  2. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* distinguishes the manifestation of sinfulness between “the wicked” and “the unrighteousness”: “The ‘wicked’ sins, more openly in ‘his way.’ the ‘unrighteous’ refers to the more subtle workings of sin in the ‘thoughts.’”
  3. None of us are righteous, i.e. sinless, Rom. 3:10, 23.
- H. The sentence “let him return unto the Lord” rightly depicts the direction of travel and the who of the travel that mankind

might be forgiven of sin.

1. God did not abandon mankind, but mankind turned and left God.
2. Consequently, God does not need to come to where man is (in the depths of sin), but mankind needs to return to where God is.

Man, in the Scriptures, is everywhere described as having wandered away from the true God. Religion consists in returning to him for pardon, for consolation, for protection, for support. The true penitent is desirous of returning to him, as the prodigal son returned to his father's house; the man who loves sin chooses to remain at a distance from God. (Barnes)

## **II. We must seek God where he can be found, i.e. there are some places we will not find God.**

- A. God cannot be found in the vain thoughts of humanity, and if man relies on his own thoughts, he will remain lost.
  1. Isa. 55:8 clearly denounces alternative plans of salvation authored by lowly humanity: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD."
  2. Yet, thousands of churches or denominations exist in our world today, each with its own version of a plan of salvation, Matt. 15:9, 13.
  3. Only God's thoughts and ways respecting salvation or religion have any lasting (eternal) merit.
- B. God cannot be found at the local bar.
  1. God does not frequent liquor establishments as some professed Christians do.
  2. God will not be found in a bottle of booze or a can of beer, Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:21.
  3. God is not nearer mortal man through any other hallucination causing drug either, 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2, 6.
- C. God cannot be found in any den of iniquity.
  1. Anywhere, anytime one couples himself with ungodly people, he will be soiled spiritually, 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18.
  2. Wherever this world's sinners congregate or participate together in sin is no place for the child of

God to be, because God is not there, e.g. where things like these take place: gambling, pornography, drinking, sensuality, immodesty, etc., 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8.

- D. Often, God cannot be found in otherwise harmless places.
1. God cannot be found on the golf course, relaxing at the lake, while fishing, resting at home or in nature when one is forsaking his assembles, Heb. 10:25.
  2. Simply, God cannot be found through vehicles or devices of man's wisdom versus through the wisdom of God, 1 Cor. 1:18-21.

**Conclusion:**

1. To be the beneficiary of divine blessings, one must seek God on his terms in this life.
2. There will come a time when it will no longer be possible to seek God.
3. God can only be found in the Word of God, which Word of God then must be acted out in our lives.

**Invitation:**

1. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth and personally invited humanity to seek God, Matt. 6:33.
2. Simply put, we truly seek God through Gospel obedience, Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Acts 2:38.
3. The same fervency with which souls became Christians must characterize their Christian lives, Rev. 3:15-16; Acts 8:22.

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# An Everlasting, New Name

Isaiah 56:5; 62:2

**Thesis:** To demonstrate from Scripture that God chose a new name for his people in the Christian Era.

**Song:** *Take the Name of Jesus with You*

## **Introduction:**

1. Sometimes people erroneously suppose that the name “Christian” came about due to derision of the enemies of Jesus Christ and his church.
2. Although the enemies of Jesus Christ and his church may have used the name “Christian” derisively, Scripture affirms that God himself chose the name “Christian” for his New Testament people.
3. The name “Christian” is an everlasting, new name selected by God himself.
4. (Incidentally, the everlasting, new name that is the subject of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment pertains to what the individual people of God would be called, not what the corporate body or church might be called in Scripture.)
  - a. Names or designations such as church of God or churches of Christ appear in the New Testament to identify the church that Jesus established, 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 16:16.
  - b. The everlasting, new name under consideration pertains to the individuals who make up the Lord’s church.

## **Body:**

- I. **The new name for the people of God was the subject of Old Testament prophecy.**
  - A. One of the prophecies relative to the Messianic kingdom was that of an everlasting, new name.
    1. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised: “I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off,” Isa. 56:5.
    2. James Burton Coffman writes of Isa. 56:5: “The name here referred to is the name, Christian. Isaiah here prophesied that the name would be given, not by God’s enemies, but by himself within his house and within his walls, that is, within the church...”

3. Further, God promised to choose the new name by which his people in the Messianic kingdom would be known, Isa. 62:2; cf. 65:15.
  4. Names have their purpose: “**1 a** : a word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing **b** : a word or symbol used in logic to designate an entity” (*Merriam Webster*).
  5. Consequently, the name of God’s people in the Messianic Era is important to identify who they are and distinguish them from all others.
- B. Any name of a religious group of people that is not the subject of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment is not a name chosen by God.
1. The first evidence often of derivation from divine instruction among religious people is their opting for a name to designate them that is neither the object of Old Testament prophecy or New Testament fulfillment.
  2. Upon closer examination, many religious people evidence no more regard for divine, doctrinal instruction than they do for selection of a religious name.
  3. Consequently, many well-meaning religious people unwittingly call themselves by unbiblical names and practice unbiblical doctrines as well.

**II. The new name for the people of God, Christian, is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about an everlasting, new name.**

- A. God himself was to select the everlasting, new name for his people in the Messianic or Gospel Age.
1. God through Isaiah said: “thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name,” Isa 62:2b.
  2. Therefore, it borders blasphemy to suggest that the enemies of God and his church instead of God himself selected the new name, Christian, Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16.
- B. The everlasting, new name for God’s people was to be “within his walls, within his house,” Isa. 56:5.
1. This means that the new name in the Messianic Era or Gospel Age was adopted by the church rather than

- foisted upon God's people in derision by their enemies.
2. The apostle Paul if not others also miraculously endowed at Antioch of Syria were capable of relaying divine revelation respecting the everlasting, new name promised by God in prophecy.
- C. The name that God promised to choose for his people in the Messianic Era was to be implemented after Gentiles were added to the people of God.
1. Isa. 62:2 specifies that Gentiles and kings, representing inclusion of non-Jews among God's people before God would appoint the everlasting, new name.
  2. This is precisely what occurred; the Gentiles were admitted to the church of the Lord by Gospel obedience before God gave the everlasting, new name, Acts 10-11.
  3. The church had existed for about ten years before God opted to bestow the new name, but contemporary with Gentile admission to the church God fulfilled the Isaiah prophecies respecting an everlasting, new name.
- D. The name that God promised to choose for his people in the Messianic Age was to be a memorial, Isa. 56:5.
1. The eternality or permanence of the everlasting, new name, coupled with the name of Jesus Christ within it, serves as a constant memorial to our Lord by those who wear his name.
  2. Not only the Lord's Supper, but the very name by which God's people are known is also a memorial to the Son of God.
  3. What each of us does with the name Christian either contributes to memorializing or disgracing the name of Jesus Christ.
- E. The name that God would choose was to be permanent, not to be replaced later by other names, Isa. 56:5.
1. Previously, God's people wore the names "saints," "brethren" and especially "disciples."
  2. The name Christian is more comprehensive and permanent; it would not be replaced with another or other names.
- F. The name that God would choose would be a "new name," not repetition of a name previously used, Isa. 62:2.

1. Names like “saints,” “brethren” or “disciples” would not qualify to be a “new name.”
2. No other designation appearing in the Bible previous to the Messianic Age could be the “new name” promised in the Book of Isaiah.
3. Only the name “Christian” qualifies as the new name.
4. If the name “Christian” is not the new name for God’s people in the Messianic Age, the prophecies of Isaiah respecting an everlasting, new name failed to be fulfilled!

**III. Any name of a religious group of people that is not the subject of New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is not a name chosen by God.**

1. Not intending to be the least uncharitable, honestly, Adventists, Baptists, Methodists, Latter Day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Presbyterians, Catholics, Nazarenes, Episcopalians, Amish, Mennonite, etc. are not names that correspond to Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment.
2. In order for a name to correspond to Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, it had to be given by God rather than selected by men.
3. In order for a name to correspond to Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, it had to be applied after Gentiles were numbered among God’s people in the Gospel Age, Isa. 62:2.
4. Only the name Christian satisfactorily corresponds to Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment with the admission of Gentiles to the Lord’s church, Acts 11:26.
5. In addition, only the name Christian is verified by inspired instruction as the sole name by which a child of God can glorify God, 1 Pet. 4:16.

**Conclusion:**

1. The College Press commentary on Acts 11:26 correctly summarizes the prophecy and fulfillment of God selecting an everlasting, new name for his people in the modern era.

The name “Christian” is here used for the first time. The manner of giving the name has been a subject of no little comment. It is our contention that the use of the

Greek word for “called” as used here carries something of the thought of being “divinely called.” That is, God Himself selected this new name (Isa. 62:2) and here called the disciples by their new name “Christians.” It was especially appropriate at this time for now both Jews and Gentiles made up the church and a name could be given by which all of them could be known. (DeWalt 156)

2. It is imperative that God’s people wear the everlasting, new name that God has chosen for his New Testament people.
3. Of course, one must conform to the Gospel or New Testament teaching in all other areas, too, in addition to wearing the name that God chose, e.g. redemption, worship, Christian living, Christian service, etc.

**Invitation:**

1. We invite you to wear the everlasting, new name that God chose by becoming a Christian, Acts 2:38.
2. We invite you to wear the everlasting, new name Christian well rather than continuing as an erring child of God, 1 John 1:9.

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# His Children Shall Have a Place of Refuge

## Proverbs 14:26-27

**Thesis:** To comfort the bereaved and exhort non-Christians and unfaithful Christians to imitate godliness to be assured of the heavenly hope.

### **Introduction:**

1. Christians have no reason to fear or begrudge death.
  - a. Death comes indiscriminately to all men, Heb. 9:27.
  - b. However, Christians have an eternal hope that non-Christians do not have, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
  - c. There is an eternal refuge for faithful children of God, Prov. 14:26-27; John 14:1-3.
2. The dead in Christ do not need our pity.
  - a. They rest from their labors, Rev. 14:13.
  - b. All pain and discomfort is ended for the faithful Christian, Rev. 21:4; 7:17.
  - c. Only the living deserve pity, and those without eternal hope are the most pitiable because a different, awful fate awaits them, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

### **Body:**

- I. **While living, Christians have refuge presently as well as in prospect.**
  - A. Christians have refuge in Christ.
    1. The first refuge a soul can know in Jesus Christ is refuge from sin by putting on Christ, Gal. 3:27.
    2. This same act of baptism puts one into the death of Jesus Christ, from which one is resurrected victorious over sin and death, Rom. 6:3-11.
    3. In addition, a Christian routinely derives strength through Jesus Christ, Phil. 4:13.
    4. Likewise, the apostle John urged Christians to maintain a communion with Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:7; 2:6.
    5. Hence, initial and sustained refuge from sin is in Jesus

Christ.

- B. Christians have refuge respecting eternal hope.
  - 1. Hope sustains and leads to eternal salvation, Rom. 8:24-25.
  - 2. Christian hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15:17-23.
  - 3. The Christian's hope is sure by the promise of God, Heb. 10:23.
  - 4. Hence, the Christian's hope for refuge is secured by God.
- C. With the mind's eye, the Christian sees the biblical portrait of the eternal refuge.
  - 1. Abraham looked for an eternal refuge, Heb. 11:10.
  - 2. The apostle Paul wrote about the Christian's desire to experience the eternal refuge, 2 Cor. 5:1-10.
  - 3. Christians long for citizenship in heaven itself, Phil. 3:20-21.
  - 4. Heaven is viewed by the child of God as a better place than life here on earth, Heb. 10:34.
  - 5. Hence, Christians await the prepared refuge of heaven, John 14:1-3; Prov. 14:26-27.

## **II. The hope of the dead in Christ is fulfilled.**

- A. For faithful children of God, the anticipated refuge of heaven will become a reality.
  - 1. The righteous dead go to a portion of Hades called by Jesus Christ, "paradise," Luke 23:43.
  - 2. There, comfort soothes the children of God, Luke 16:22-25.
  - 3. In Hades, the children of God await the general resurrection of the dead and their resurrection to glory, John 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
  - 4. Hence, Hades provides a refuge for the departed souls of the children of God.
  - 5. The refuge of heaven for which Christians long is yet future.
- B. When Jesus Christ returns again, the Christian hope of refuge will be completely fulfilled.
  - 1. All the children of God will be ushered into heaven, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
  - 2. All woes will be forever past, Rev. 21:4.

3. All earthly labors will have ceased, Rev. 14:13.
4. Hence, the dead in Christ and faithful Christians yet alive when Jesus returns will enter the eternal refuge of heaven together.

**Conclusion:**

1. At death, the soul returns to God, Ecc. 12:7.
2. Righteousness lived in this life assures access to the eternal refuge of heaven, Rev. 22:14.

**Invitation:**

1. Those who follow Jesus Christ are worthy of imitation, 1 Cor. 11:1.
2. Our departed loved one followed Jesus Christ by coming to him according to his terms for salvation, Mark 16:16.
3. Only faithful Christians have the assurance of heavenly hope, Rev. 2:10.

# Epitaphs

## Mark 14:8-9

**Thesis:** To illustrate the summary of lives lived, with contrasting eternal ends, to prompt self-evaluation and corresponding amendment of one's life.

**Song:** *Take My Life, And Let It Be.*

### **Introduction:**

1. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines the word "epitaph" as "an inscription on or at a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there."
2. In other words, epitaphs are short sayings sometimes written on tombstones that summarize lives into capsulated messages.
3. Some epitaphs are humorous, some are thought-provoking and some are frank at best or unkind at their worst.
4. For many people, an epitaph on a gravestone may be all the memory they leave behind.
5. It may be interesting to surmise what epitaphs could have summarized the lives of various Bible characters.
6. More importantly, what would an accurate epitaph of our respective lives say about each of us?

### **Body:**

#### **I. Consider some of these real epitaphs from near and far as well as across the centuries.**

- A. Here are some actual epitaphs that you may find amusing.
  1. Consider this epitaph from a Ruidoso, New Mexico cemetery: "Here lies Johnny Yeast. Pardon me For not rising" (*Actual Epitaphs*).
  2. This epitaph mentions the accident that claimed the man's life (Uniontown, Pennsylvania): "Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake; Stepped on the gas instead of the brake" (*Actual Epitaphs*).
  3. The following epitaph belongs to Lester Moore, a Wells Fargo station agent for Naco, Arizona in the 1880's. He's buried in the Boot Hill Cemetery in Tombstone, Arizona: "Here lies Lester Moore, Four slugs from a .44, No Les No More" (*Actual Epitaphs*).

4. A similar epitaph from a Colorado cemetery has inscribed, “Here lies a man named Zeke. Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek” (Shaputis).
  5. An epitaph in a Georgia cemetery reads, “I told you I was sick!” (*Actual Epitaphs*).
  6. Another tragic fatal accident made its way to the tombstone was that of Harry Edsel Smith of Albany, New York: “Looked up the elevator shaft to see if the car was on the way down. It was” (*Actual Epitaphs*).
  7. This epitaph appears on a grave in Nantucket, Massachusetts: “Under the sod and under the trees, Lies the body of Jonathan Pease. He is not here, there’s only the pod: Pease shelled out and went to God” (*Actual Epitaphs*).
  8. The epitaph of Margaret Daniels in Hollywood Cemetery Richmond, Virginia reads, “She always said her feet were killing her but nobody believed her” (*Actual Epitaphs*).
- B. Listen to these real epitaphs that may be thought-provoking.
1. The following famous epitaph appears on several tombstones: “My Dear Friends as You Pass By, As You are Now, So Once Was I. As I am Now, You Soon Must Be. Prepare Yourselves to Follow Me” (“Tombstone Epitaphs”).
  2. An epitaph for a Bonnie Parker (Crown Hill Cemetery, Dallas, Texas) reads, “As the flowers are all made sweeter by the sunshine and the dew, so this old world is made brighter by the lives of folks like you” (*Epitaph Browser*).
  3. The epitaph of Abe Bell (Boston, Massachusetts) remarks, “He has gone to the only place where his own works are excelled” (*Epitaph Browser*); the epitaph, though, doesn’t clearly distinguish which direction he was thought to be headed in eternity (for people reading the epitaph who did not know Mr. Bell).
  4. The tombstone of a colonial era New England woman reads, “She did what she could” (“Tombstone Epitaphs”).
  5. An epitaph from Ravlunda, Sweden for Fritiof Nilsson Piraten says, “Here beneath rest the ashes of a man

who was in habit of always postponing everything till the day after. However, at last he improved and really died, Jan 31 1972” (*Epitaph Browser*).

6. This epitaph appears in a Thurmont, Maryland, cemetery: “Here lies an Atheist, All dressed up, And no place to go” (*Actual Epitaphs*).
- C. Some of the frankest epitaphs may appear to be uncharitable or unkind.
1. The epitaph of a John T. McMahon (Vine Hill Cemetery, Plymouth Massachusetts) says, “He was a failure as a husband and father, he was insane 15 years because of liquor, but died sober. May Christ have mercy on his soul; he was not a pilgrim” (*Epitaph Browser*).
  2. The epitaph of John Starkwether (Silver Lake Cemetery in Portage, Wisconsin) records, “Here is where friend Starkwether lies, Nobody laughs, nobody cries, Where he goes, how he fares, Nobody knows, nobody cares” (*Epitaph Browser*).
  3. A similar, anonymous epitaph from Lemmington, England summarizes one life thus: “Here lies a miser who lived for himself, who cared for nothing but gathering wealth. Now where he is and how he fares; nobody knows and nobody cares” (*Epitaph Browser*).
  4. Consider the epitaph of a lumberjack, Paul Lennis Swank, (Canyonville Cemetery in Canyonville, Oregon): “Here under the dung of the cows and sheep, Lies an old highclimber fast asleep. His trees all topped and his lines all hung, They say the old rascal died full of rum” (*Epitaph Browser*).

## **II. Consider some epitaphs that could have been etched in stone respecting various Bible characters.**

- A. Some epitaphs for biblical persons if accurately inscribed would praise the persons whose lives they summarized.
1. Righteous Abel’s epitaph might read, “He being dead yet speaketh,” Heb. 11:4.
  2. Consider this outstanding epitaph worded by Jesus Christ: “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist,” Matt. 11:11.

3. Another suitable epitaph worded by Jesus could have been this one about Nathaniel: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no [“guile” KJV] deceit!” John 1:47 NKJV.
  4. Truly our Lord Jesus did propose an epitaph for an unnamed woman who anointed him with spices; “She has done what she could,” Mark 14:8-9.
  5. The epitaph at Jesus Christ’s empty tomb could have said, “He laid down his life for us,” 1 John 3:16.
  6. Tabitha’s epitaph could have been, “Full of good works and charitable deeds,” Acts 9:36 NKJV.
  7. The apostle Paul’s epitaph could have read, “[He was] all things to all men that...[he] might by all means save some,” 1 Cor. 9:22.
- B. Some epitaphs for biblical persons if accurately inscribed would condemn the persons whose lives they summarized.
1. Cain’s epitaph could have been, “The voice of...[his] brother’s blood cries out...from the ground,” Gen. 4:10 NKJV.
  2. Nadab and Abihu’s epitaphs could have been, “[They] offered strange fire before the LORD which he commanded them not,” Lev. 10:1.
  3. King Saul’s epitaph could have read, “He opted to offer unauthorized worship to God instead of obeying God, whereby he lost both his kingdom and God’s favor,” 1 Sam. 15.
  4. King Ahab’s epitaph could have been, “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD,” 1 Kings 21:25.
  5. The epitaphs of Hymenaeus and Alexander could have been, “They made shipwreck of their faith and were delivered unto Satan,” 1 Tim. 1:19-20.
  6. Trembling Governor Felix’s epitaph is, “He waited for a convenient season,” Acts 24:25.
  7. King Agrippa’s epitaph could have been, “Almost persuaded to become a Christian,” Acts 26:28.
  8. The epitaph of Diotrephes was essentially, “Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence...putting [brethren] out of the church,” 3 John 9-10.

### **III. Consider some epitaphs that could have been etched in stone respecting various people today.**

- A. Some of these epitaphs would be positive and complimentary to the dead.
1. "He was a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of the faith and of good doctrine," 1 Tim. 4:6.
  2. "He fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith," 2 Tim. 4:7.
  3. "To him God will say, 'Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,'" Matt. 25:21.
  4. "He was faithful unto death," Rev. 2:10.
- B. Some of these epitaphs would be negative and critical of the dead.
1. "Sober at last," Prov. 23:29-35.
  2. "Here lies the prodigal who never returned to his heavenly Father," Luke 15:11-32.
  3. "He never met a vice he didn't indulge at least once," 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
  4. "Though he couldn't find time for God, God found time for him," Heb. 9:27.
  5. "His faith grew lukewarm," Rev. 3:16.

#### **Conclusion:**

1. What kind of epitaph would accurately represent the life you have lived so far?
2. Would the epitaph be funny?
3. Would it be praiseworthy of a life lived to serve God and man?
4. Or, would your epitaph be an embarrassing commentary on a misspent life by which you are unprepared to meet God in eternity?

#### **Invitation:**

1. The best epitaph by which to remember anyone living in this age is simply, "Here lies a Christian who was not ashamed of his faith," 1 Pet. 4:16; Rom. 1:16.
2. Are you a Christian, that is, a member of the Lord's church, Acts 2:38, 41, 47?
3. Are you a faithful Christian, 2 Cor. 13:5?
4. If you were to die today, what would your epitaph accurately represent your life to be?

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# The Only Census that Really Matters

## Revelation 7:9-10

**Thesis:** The only census that really matters is the innumerable host of souls throughout time who comprise the everlasting kingdom.

**Song:** *When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder*

### **Introduction:**

1. Several occasions of a census being taken appear in the Bible.
2. A census is “a count of the population” (*Merriam*).
3. Some of these were authorized by God, whereas others were not authorized by God.
4. The only census that really matters is the innumerable host of souls throughout time who comprise the everlasting kingdom, Rev. 7:9-10.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Several occasions of a census being taken appear in the Bible.**

- A. God ordered a census be taken on two occasions of the new nation of Israel between its exodus from Egypt and arrival in Canaan.
  1. Four months following the exodus from Egypt, God required that males 20-years-old and upward be numbered, totaling 603,550, Exod. 38:26.
  2. Immediately before entering Canaan, God caused another census to be taken of males 20-years-old and upward, totaling 601,730, Num. 26:51.
- B. King David ordered a census for which he admitted having committed sin in doing so.
  1. Against the advice of his counselors, King David numbered the men able to go to war (20-year-olds and upward), totaling 1,300,000 without counting the men in the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, 2 Sam. 24:9; 1 Chron. 21:5.
  2. God was displeased with the taking of this census and King David repented of this sin, 1 Chron. 21:7-8.
  3. Generally, students of the Bible concede that King

David apparently numbered the people on this occasion as an act of pride.

4. Apparently, King Solomon augmented the census of his father, David, by taking a census of foreigners among the Israelites, 2 Chron. 2:17-18.
- C. A census was conducted in the time of Ezra respecting the Jews who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem.
1. Ezra records the census at 42,360 (2:64).
  2. *McClintock and Strong* gives extensive information respecting several censuses conducted in Bible times, including different occasions of Jews returning from Babylonian captivity.
- D. On two occasions, a Roman census appears in the New Testament.
1. “The Roman system of taking census began in 10 BC - 9 BC Such a registration took place every 14 years” (*Nelson’s*).
  2. A Roman census was the occasion that prompted Joseph and Mary to be in their ancestral hometown of Bethlehem when Jesus was born, Luke 2:1-3.
  3. Acts 5:37 refers to a Roman census in A.D. 6 that resulted in a Jewish uprising (*McClintock and Strong*).

## II. **The only census that really matters is the innumerable host of souls throughout time who comprise the everlasting kingdom, Rev. 7:9-10.**

- A. Earthly census is for the purpose of taxation or some other earthly matter.
1. Modern censuses gather various kinds of information, including family names, education attainments, ages, etc.
  2. The importance of earthly censuses is short-lived, useful for government purposes and family tree research, neither of which purposes have any eternal significance.
- B. A divine census of citizens of the heavenly kingdom is more important than any earthly census, Rev. 7:9-10.
1. Humans cannot count the vast number of citizens of the heavenly kingdom.
  2. Even so, the number of souls in the kingdom of heaven represents a minority of humanity, with the majority of

souls unfortunately lost, Matt. 7:14-15.

3. Only those who do the will of God revealed in what we call the Bible will be in the eternal kingdom, Matt. 7:21-23.

### **Conclusion:**

There are five instances of a census of the Jewish people having been taken. (1.) In the fourth month after the Exodus, when the people were encamped at Sinai. The number of men from twenty years old and upward was then 603,550 (Ex. 38:26). (2.) Another census was made just before the entrance into Canaan, when the number was found to be 601,730, showing thus a small decrease (Num. 26:51). (3.) The next census was in the time of David, when the number, exclusive of the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, was found to be 1,300,000 (2 Sam. 24:9; 1 Chr. 21:5). (4.) Solomon made a census of the foreigners in the land, and found 153,600 able-bodied workmen (2 Chr. 2:17, 18). (5.) After the return from Exile the whole congregation of Israel was numbered, and found to amount to 42,360 (Ezra 2:64). A census was made by the Roman government in the time of our Lord (Luke 2:1). (Easton)

1. "Two Roman censuses are mentioned in NT...translated 'enrolment' in Lk. 2:2 and 'census' in Acts 5:37" (*New Bible Dictionary*).
2. The only census that really matters is the innumerable host of souls throughout time who comprise the everlasting kingdom.

### **Invitation:**

1. Seeking the kingdom of heaven is a more important pursuit than any other activity in this life, Matt. 6:33; Col. 1:13.
2. People today, like the Samaritans, need to be baptized into the kingdom, Acts 8:12.
3. Christians must guard their citizenship in the kingdom and repent of any sins they may commit, 2 Pet. 1:10-11; Acts 8:22.

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# Death in Due Time (or at An Appointed Time)

## Hebrews 9:27

**Thesis:** Death is the final appointment for each person, an appointment that for which one can neither be late nor avoid.

### **Introduction:**

1. Death is the final and ultimate goal toward which every life marches from the time of one's birth.
  - a. Death is inevitable, and we all know it, Heb. 9:27.
  - b. Really, death is merely the last plateau in routine life to which every soul must climb.
  - c. Death is a natural and an anticipated part of life for every living creature.
2. Though we would very much like to deny the reality and inevitability of death, no sane person can do that, because the evidence is overwhelming.
3. Death is the final appointment for each person, an appointment that for which one can neither be late nor avoid.

### **Body:**

- I. Though the certainty of death for us all is unquestioned, the time of our death is uncertain.**
  - A. We probably picture the day of our passing as something occurring in the distant future.
  - B. It is true that the typical lifespan encompasses several decades, Psa. 90:10.
    1. By the standard of Psalm 90:10, our departed loved one today lived a full life.
    2. However, even then one's lifespan seems but a fleeting moment, Job 9:25; Psa. 39:5.
  - C. Regardless of how long we may live, our time on earth is ever so short, Job 14:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:24.
  - D. No one has the assurance of even one more day to live on planet earth, Jam. 4:14.
- II. Though death is real and unavoidable, what is it?**
  - A. Emotionally, death has traditionally been a time of

- soberness, sorrow and bereavement, John 11:33-35.
- B. Biblically, death is the departure of the soul from the body, Jam. 2:26; Gen. 35:18; Ecc. 12:7.
  - C. After death, a soul awaits the great Judgment Day.
    - 1. There will be a great, general resurrection from the death of the just and the unjust, John 5:28-29.
    - 2. Everyone will appear in the great Judgment to be sentenced to eternal life or eternal condemnation, 2 Cor. 5:10; Ecc. 12:13-14.
  - D. Divine revelation will be the basis of Final Judgment.
    - 1. No one can be saved eternally who disregarded the words of Jesus, John 12:48.
    - 2. Everyone must have genuinely acted out divine revelation in his or her life, Matt. 7:21-23.
    - 3. The most awe inspiring representation of Final Judgment appears in Rev. 20:12-15.

### **III. Death, however, is not viewed alike by all people.**

- A. Atheists say that death is the end of everything, and that mankind and animals die the same death and share the same hopeless grave.
- B. Agnostics and infidels, through doubts and denials, are void of any hope or comfort respecting death.
- C. Universalism promises unconditional pardon to all humanity, offering a false hope that will not be realized in eternity.
- D. Denominationalism proposes to determine the eternal disposition of the dead, often preaching the most despicable persons into the very presence of God in heaven, Jam. 4:12.
- E. World religions, owing their existence to sheer fantasy and vivid imaginations, make a horrible mockery of divine revelation, including death, judgment and eternity.
- F. Only true Christianity about which anyone can read upon the pages of the New Testament is capable of offering genuine hope to the bereaved respecting their departed loved ones.
  - 1. At dire times such as these, we must appeal to the God of all comfort, 2 Cor. 1:3-4.
  - 2. When we become Christians on God's terms and remain faithful Christians, we have hope and comfort regarding our departed loved ones, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
  - 3. However, for those outside of Christ, the dead and the living, there is only misery when death comes calling,

1 Cor. 15:19; Luke 16:19-31.

**Conclusion:**

1. The solution, of course, is to obey the author of eternal salvation, Jesus Christ, Heb. 5:9.
2. Summarized, this obedience on man's part includes hearkening to the Word of God and believing it, repenting of sins, professing one's belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, being immersed in water for the remission of sins and remaining faithful throughout one's life, Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30, Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37; Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16; Rev. 2:10.
3. A crown of life awaits faithful Christian, 2 Tim. 4:8.
  - a. We, too, can face death without fear, doubting or regret in hope that is afforded to each faithful Christian.
  - b. To die in hope that rests on Bible truths is not to die, but rather to be translated from a life of distress and testing to an eternal, blissful, holy habitation with God, Rev. 14:13.
  - c. Death has no sting to those who die in the Lord, 1 Cor. 15:51-57.

# An Allen Wrench in the Toolbox of God

## Matthew 25:14-15

**Thesis:** To emphasize Christian service irrespective of one's abilities and opportunities.

**Song:** *I Want to Be a Worker*

### **Introduction:**

1. Recently I discovered that some toolboxes cost thousands of dollars (without any tools in them); I have no intention of buying one.
  - a. Tools themselves are expensive and come in all shapes and sizes to suit a variety of needs.
  - b. One's array of tools might include little hammers and big hammers, little wrenches and big wrenches, screwdrivers of every dimension, several sets of pliers in a variety of sizes, etc.
  - c. The list of tools is nearly endless, and new tools are being devised with some frequency.
2. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* definition for the word "tool" includes:
  - a. "a handheld device that aids in accomplishing a task" or "one that is used or manipulated by another."
  - b. Often in my prayers I pray that others and I may be useful tools in the hands of God to accomplish his will on the earth.
3. With that in mind, I just want to be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God.
  - a. By that, I mean that I don't have to do something stupendous to be a profitable servant of God.
  - b. However, I must do something, and that something must be the best that I can do, Col. 3:23-24.
4. Too many people, including Christians, excuse themselves from Christian service because they cannot do something great.
  - a. An allen wrench is one of the smallest tools that one might have in his toolbox.
  - b. Yet, the allen wrench, which itself comes in a variety of sizes, is **essential** for some applications.

- c. **Every Christian is essential** in the work of our Lord's kingdom, irrespective of how limited he may esteem his abilities and opportunities, Matt. 25:14-30.

**Body:**

**I. I want to be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God when it comes to worshipping him in his own appointed way.**

- A. God through the New Testament has designated the way in which he wants to be worshipped on the Lord's Day.
1. Public worship must occur a minimum of once weekly (unless on some occasions beyond one's control he cannot assemble for worship) on the Lord's Day, Heb. 10:25; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2.
  2. I can pray with the assembly whether leading the prayer or saying "amen" to it, Phil. 4:20; 1 Cor. 14:16.
  3. I can sing with the assembly whether leading the songs or humbly trying my best to participate, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16.
  4. If not preaching the sermon, I can participate in that aspect of worship by paying close attention to the Word of God as it is spoken, Acts 17:11.
  5. Even if not officiating at the Lord's Table, I can participate in the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ for us, 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Acts 20:7.
  6. I can participate in the weekly collection whether I help take up the Lord's money, and whether I personally have much or little to give, 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Mark 12:41-44.
  7. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God through my public worship as long as I worship my God in his own appointed way.
- B. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God through my personal worship opportunities daily.
1. Christians ought to pray often, and almost any moment of any day in any place provides an opportunity to pray, 1 Thess. 4:17.
  2. The frequent prayers of Christians are effective in soliciting God's providential blessings, Luke 18:1-8; Jam. 5:16.
  3. Some times during each day naturally lend themselves

to approaching God in prayer, such as three mealtimes, Matt. 6:9-13; John 6:11, 23; Acts 27:35; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Rom. 14:6; Psalms 55:17; Daniel 6:10.

4. We can pray when we arise in the morning and when we retire at night, Psalms 5:3; 88:1;
5. We need to pray for any who are in any trouble, Acts 12:12.
6. We need to pray for political and civil rulers, 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2.
7. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God through my personal worship through frequent prayers.

## **II. I want to be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God when it comes to Christian service.**

- A. I must always be ready to serve God, Titus 2:14.
  1. I can be a tool in the hands of God by giving a defense of the Christian faith, Phil. 1:17; 1 Peter 3:15.
  2. I can provide honorable service to God by attending to the needs of the less fortunate, Matt. 25:31-46; James 1:27; Acts 6:1-7.
  3. Many Christians have the opportunity and responsibility to serve God by rearing their children properly, Eph. 6:1, 4.
  4. We can serve God by attending to the necessary details concerning the maintenance of our place of worship, Exodus 25-40; Numbers 4:15.
  5. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God if I am “always abounding in the work of the Lord,” 1 Cor. 15:58.
- B. I must prepare myself for greater service to God, 2 Tim. 2:15.
  1. We must prepare ourselves to be able to teach the Word of God, Hebrews 5:12-14.
  2. We can prepare ourselves for greater service by readying ourselves to preach the Word of God, 2 Tim. 2:2; Acts 21:9.
  3. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God if I develop my abilities and seize every opportunity to serve God.

### **III. I want to be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God when it comes to godly living.**

- A. I must realize that the way in which I conduct myself has an influence on others around me.
  - 1. Each of us influences our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, fellow students and even people we do not know with whom we come in contact in public, e.g. at the grocery store, other drivers, etc.
  - 2. We must be a light to the world and not add to the darkness already abundant, Matt. 5:16; Prov. 4:18; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15-16.
  - 3. A tool in the hands of God does not curse, does not tell lies, is not dishonest, is not lazy, is not divisive, does not murmur, does not imbibe alcohol, does not approve of the sins of others, etc., Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:12; 2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:10; 10:10; Phil. 2:14; Gal. 5:21; Rom. 1:32.
  - 4. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God if I wield a Christian influence.
- B. I must realize that I have a responsibility to exhibit the highest degree of morality.
  - 1. However, if I make my closest associates the ungodly of this world, I will hurt my influence and quite possibly be drawn into sin, 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18.
  - 2. We must turn from the ungodliness and lusts in the world, Titus 2:12; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
  - 3. I can be an allen wrench in the toolbox of God if I am driven by the Word of God rather than the lusts of this world, 1 John 2:15-17.

#### **Conclusion:**

- 1. If I am not a tool in the hands of the living God, I am next to worthless.
- 2. I may only be as an allen wrench in the toolbox of God, but I aim to be as useful a tool in his hands as I can be.
- 3. How productive could a congregation be and the brotherhood of Christ all over the world if every Christian would resolve to be a tool in the hands of the living God, even if only an allen wrench in the toolbox of God.

**Invitation:**

1. Frankly, one cannot be a tool in the hands of God until he becomes a Christian.
2. One becomes a Christian through faith, repentance, confessing Jesus to be the Son of God and immersion in water for the remission of sins, John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38; Col. 2:12.
3. In addition, only a faithful Christian can be a tool in the hands of God, Rev. 2:10; Acts 8:22.

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# Glorifying God

## 1 Corinthians 10:31

**Thesis:** To emphasize that the chief duty of every child of God is to glorify God.

**Song:** *Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah!*

### **Introduction:**

1. I invite you to pay very close attention this morning because:
  - a. In the first place, this is the most important sermon that I have ever preached!
  - b. Secondly, this is the most important sermon that you will ever hear!
  - c. The significance of the sermon at this hour is neither owing to any special ability that I have as a preacher nor to any special insight that I might have as a longtime student of the Bible.
  - d. The sermon today has life-changing power owing exclusively to the biblical material under consideration.
2. There is nothing—I repeat and emphasize, nothing—any more important for the child of God today to master than the realization that his **chief duty in this life is to glorify God**.
  - a. The Greek noun *doxa* (dox'-ah) and the Greek verb *doxazo* (dox-ad'-zo) both are sometimes translated “honor.”
  - b. W.E. Vine defines *doxazo* including “to magnify, extol, praise.”
  - c. There are a number of ways that one can honor God, or on the other hand, dishonor God.
3. Just how important is it to honor or glorify God?
  - a. Glorifying God is more important than lessons about salvation!
  - b. Glorifying God is more important than lessons about how God wants to be worshipped.
  - c. Glorifying God is more important than lessons about church attendance, Christian living and Christian service.
  - d. Glorifying God is more important than lessons about what we usually cite as the mission of the church—evangelism, edification and benevolence.
4. The reason that glorifying God is more important than any and all of these biblical subjects is that we cannot satisfactorily for very

long do any of those things—unless we first glorify God, and continually glorify God.

- a. Glorifying God first before consideration of any other New Testament subject or duty is a huge and immensely important shift from the customary preaching of **hell avoidance** and **course correction** in the churches of Christ.
- b. It is no wonder that today the churches of Christ, like denominations around them, often face a staying problem with respect to its members and members' children.
- c. I am indebted for some of the basic thoughts contained in this sermon to a thought-provoking article written by preacher and elder T. Pierce Brown appearing in *Gospel Gazette Online* ([www.gospelgazette.com/2006/oct/page13 .htm](http://www.gospelgazette.com/2006/oct/page13.htm)).

### **Body:**

#### **I. Unless we purpose to glorify God, our response to the Gospel will be one of frequent wavering.**

- A. A response to the Gospel that is motivated primarily by the desire to avoid punishment for sins (i.e. receive forgiveness of sins) lacks staying power.
  1. A religion motivated on avoiding hell and attaining heaven is really a **self-centered** rather than a **Christ-centered** religion.
  2. Essentially, this type of a response to the Gospel is the mentality of **“What do I get out of it?”**
  3. The idea of “What do I get out of it?” as the fundamental basis of our religious life lays for us a **trap** of evaluating every command and religious activity by this rule.
- B. The most obvious manifestation of the “What do I get out of it?” attitude are **thousands of empty pews** throughout the churches of Christ around the world.
  1. No wonder, since we characteristically invite lost souls to become Christians by unwittingly asking them to buy into this mentality of “What do I get out of it?”

How many hundreds of us have started off with the crippling psychological barrier like this: “The water is warm, the baptistry is ready, the clothing is prepared, and we are happy for you to come” with the subtle and unrecognized implication that if the water is cold, and you have to walk a mile in the snow, breaking the ice to

be baptized, and the lions, the rack or stake might await you at the end of it, you really ought to wait! Do you not see that if the ultimate purpose of your life is to “get saved” as it is often inelegantly put, then when you have done what it takes (or what you think it takes) to do that, all of your intellectual and emotional being is geared to stop at approximately that point. Why should a person whose goal is to win a hundred-yard dash run on for half a mile? But **if your ultimate purpose from the beginning is to glorify God, then there is no stopping place for you.** (Brown emphasis added)

2. While being goal-oriented is helpful in attaining benchmarks of progress, we have the wrong primary goal unless we first purpose to glorify God, 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11.

## II. **“Glorifying God should be the ultimate purpose behind all preaching, programs, building or activity, no matter what is its nature” (Brown).**

- A. Glorifying God as one’s decided purpose in life automatically speaks to proper Christian conduct for worship.

You do not ask the question, “Do I have to come on Sunday nights or Wednesday nights to be saved?” for it never occurs to you. The thing by which you measure each response and action in life is, “Does it glorify God?” and not, “What benefit do I personally get from it?” (Brown)

1. Further, may we sing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs for the purpose of glorifying God, Eph. 5:19.
2. May we glorify God through our prayers, 1 Cor. 14:15.
3. May we glorify God on purpose through the sermons preached and sermons heard, Acts 20:7; 1 Thess. 2:13.
4. May the way we give according to purposing in our hearts and in keeping with our prosperity glorify God, 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7.
5. May we truly glorify God through the reverent memorial of the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 11:23-26.
6. Besides our public worship, may we through our prayers and Bible study in our private worship truly

aim to glorify God.

- B. Glorifying God as one's decided purpose in life automatically speaks to proper Christian conduct for Christian living.
  - 1. Robertson writes respecting "glory to God" in 1 Cor. 10:31: "This is the ruling motive in the Christian's life..."
  - 2. When glorifying God is one's chief pursuit in life, he does not have to ponder whether so-called social drinking is acceptable behavior or if dancing is okay, Gal. 5:21.
  - 3. One does not have to wonder about any host of things over which he may be conflicted as to whether God absolutely prohibits it or requires it; one need only ask himself or herself "Does it glorify God?"
  - 4. With the intention of glorifying God at every opportunity, a child of God will automatically refrain from much useless or hurtful speech and conduct.
  - 5. Every Christian needs an abiding consciousness of proactively seeking to glorify God.
- C. In order to know how to glorify God, one must arm himself or herself with a thorough knowledge of the Word of God.
  - 1. There is no getting around studying the Bible, 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11.
  - 2. Only by becoming Bible literate can one properly discern between good and evil, and no one can glorify God while embracing evil, Heb. 5:14.
  - 3. God's Word is the spiritual food that turns babes in Christ into mature Christians, 1 Pet. 2:2.

### **III. Largely, one's conduct either glorifies God or it does not glorify God.**

- A. Sinful activity always negates glory to God in one's life.
  - 1. The apostle Paul noted that generally Gentiles were guilty of not glorifying God when they were unthankful and turned to sinful behavior, Rom. 1:21.
  - 2. The apostle Paul concluded after citing the sins of Gentiles and Jews, that everyone sins, which detracts from the glory of God, Rom. 3:23.
- B. Every child of God ought to purpose to glorify God.
  - 1. The apostle Paul emphasized the glory due God now

- and forever, Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20.
2. Personally, I purpose to glorify God through my preaching and pray about that prior to every sermon I present.
  3. While one does not have to become charismatic, nevertheless he needs to consciously intend for the sum of his life to glorify God.
  4. There is no more worthy motivation in life than to purpose to glorify God at every opportunity.
- C. What are some of the ways in which we can glorify God?
1. Christians in conjunction with each other need to glorify God together as though we do so with “one mind and one mouth,” Rom. 15:6.
  2. Christians can glorify God when it is necessary to suffer for being a Christian, 1 Pet. 4:16.
  3. A follower of Jesus Christ may find it necessary to glorify God in death, John 21:19.
  4. Christians can glorify God through benevolence and through the weekly contribution in worship, 2 Cor. 9:13.
  5. Christians glorify God through their good works that lead their fellow mankind to glorify God, Matt. 5:16.
  6. The children of God must glorify God through the use of their bodies as well as the preparation of their souls, 1 Cor. 6:20.
  7. There is no more exemplary way to glorify God than through evangelism, leading others through the Gospel to salvation, Mark 16:15-16.
- D. Each of us can make a checklist of ways in which we can glorify God, and a rival checklist of ways in which we are detracting from or at least wasting moments to glorify God.
1. Does my speech glorify God or detract from glorifying God, Col. 3:8?
  2. Does my choice of companions and friends affect my ability to glorify God, 1 Cor. 15:33?
  3. Does my choice of entertainment or the way I spend my money affect me being able to glorify God, Heb. 11:25?
  4. Do the clothes that I choose to wear serve to glorify God or detract from my ability to glorify God, 1 Tim.

2:9-10?

5. Can I glorify God at school, or at the workplace?

**Conclusion:**

1. Even promoting any New Testament doctrine before emphasizing the need to glorify God produces an unbalanced religion.
2. Well-meaning preachers and elders have actually damaged the body of Christ ultimately by not emphasizing the Christian duty to glorify God before rightly emphasizing New Testament doctrine about evangelism, worship, Christian living, Christian service, etc.
3. Of course, one cannot glorify God properly unless he conforms to New Testament doctrine about evangelism, worship, Christian living, Christian service, etc., but none of this will ever be what it could be, or endure indefinitely unless one's motivation for it all is glorifying God.
4. "God's glory is paramount; human appetite and convenience have no weight whatever when opposed to God's glory" (Coffman).
  - a. Until we set our minds to glorify God, we will never be the Christians we could and ought to be.
  - b. Until we set our minds to glorify God by becoming and remaining faithful Christians, we will waver in our Christianity.

**Invitation:**

1. One cannot glorify God while neglecting to become a Christian, Acts 2:38.
2. One cannot glorify God while being an unfaithful Christian, 1 John 1:9.

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# Honest Things

## 2 Corinthians 8:21

**Thesis:** To demonstrate that honesty goes a long way, both with God and one's fellow man.

**Song:** *To the Work; I Want to Be a Worker*

### **Introduction:**

1. Inspired instruction in 2 Cor. 8:21 dictates that especially Christians demonstrate honesty both with God and one's fellow man.
2. Aside from the Bible, in the business world it is not enough to be honest, but one has to appear honest as well, e.g. employees at work need to not only do their assigned work, but appear to be busy as well.

### **Body:**

#### **I. Just what is the context of 2 Cor. 8:21?**

- A. The apostle Paul and others with his missionary team were taking up a collection to take to famine-stricken Christians in Palestine.
  1. Especially where money is concerned, people often make wild, unsubstantiated allegations.

All christian churches, missions, and para-church organizations, whose very existence depends on the "gracious stewardship" of individual Christians, are obligated by scriptural command and apostolic precedent to make an accounting in the presence of the Lord and the presence of men. It must not only be their aim to do so, they must "make arrangements" or "take precautions" to do so. Those who give must be given an open, honest, "good" report of the administration of their gifts. It is the responsibility of individual Christians to support only those christian works which are willing to make arrangements for sound financial auditing, accounting, and reporting. Such financial responsibility is "honorable" (good) before the Lord and men. (Butler 291)

2. In the case of the apostle Paul, B.W. Johnson notes that the apostle was determined “to provide what was honest, **in the sight of God**, for his conscience’s sake, and **in the sight of men** for his work’s sake.”
- B. The word “providing” is very significant and needs to be defined before we can understand how this instruction applies to our lives.
1. “Providing” means “to consider in advance, i.e. look out for beforehand (actively, by way of maintenance for others...” (*Biblesoft’s*).
  2. Consequently, Christians are instructed to plan ahead for taking care of their families or face being dubbed as though they were an unbelievers, 1 Tim. 5:8.
- C. The “men” before whom the child of God is to manifest his honesty refers to human beings or mankind without respect to gender.

## II. Living one’s life honestly before God and his fellow man preemptively refutes false allegations before they arise.

- A. “It is not enough for God to know that a man’s conscience is clear; he should order his affairs in such a manner that people will also be aware of it” (Coffman).
1. Matthew Henry advised from 2 Cor. 8:21 that the responsible person will choose:

...to act so prudently as to prevent, as far as we can, all unjust suspicions concerning us, and all occasions of scandalous imputations. Note, We live in a censorious world, and should cut off occasion from those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully. It is the crime of others if they reproach or censure us without occasion; and it is our imprudence at least if we give them any occasion, when there may not be a just cause for them so to do.

2. Albert Barnes writes:

The sentiment is, that we are to see to it beforehand that all our conduct shall be comely or honest. The word rendered “providing for” ...means foreseeing, or perceiving beforehand; and the idea is, that we are to make it a matter of previous calculation, a settled plan, a thing that is to be attended to of set design.

- B. Especially concerning the management and administration of

other people's money calls for the demonstration of honesty before God and one's fellow man.

1. One's demeanor, conduct and reputation should reduce the likelihood of baseless accusations being made.
  2. This demeanor, conduct and reputation happens not by accident, but by consistent, trustworthy behavior, Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 2:12, 15-16 ASV, NKJV.
- C. Every Christian has a responsibility to be a good steward of his own wealth as well as any prosperity of others with which he may be entrusted.

Every christian is "accountable" for his stewardship before the Lord (Matt. 18:23; Luke 16:2; Rom. 14:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5) and before men (Matt. 5:16; John 15:8; Phil. 2:14-16; I Thess. 4:9-12; 11 Thess. 3:10-13; I Tim. 5:7-8; Rom. 14:18; I Pet. 2:12). (Butler 291).

- D. The biblical principle in 2 Cor. 8:21 should extend to all aspects of the Christian's life.

It may be applied to the acquisition and use of property; to the discharge of our professional duties; to our contact with others; to our treatment of inferiors and dependents; to our charities, etc. -in all of which we should make it a matter of previous thought, of earnest diligence, that our conduct should be perfectly honest and comely before God and man. (Barnes).

1. Students in school **should be** diligent in their studies and deportment with their peers and school personnel, as well as **appear to be** cooperative in their education.
2. Employees and employers ought to conduct themselves appropriately in keeping with good work ethics, as well as appear to be genuinely interested in their respective roles as employees and employers.
3. Family members ought to be responsive to their family members and appear to be affectionately interested in family roles and interaction.
4. Christians ought to serve their Lord and appear to serve their Lord effectively.
5. Especially preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, etc. ought to not only perform their respective duties, but

they ought to appear to any onlookers as performing their respective responsibilities.

- E. In every imaginable role one might occupy, he needs to do the work and appear to be working in that role.

**Conclusion:**

1. Are we perceived to be trustworthy with other people's money, should anyone entrust us with it?
  - a. Are we responsible with the use of our own money?
  - b. If we are not, no one will have confidence that we can be trusted with resources that belong to others.
2. Are we honest and appear to be honest to observers of our lives in every area that could be scrutinized?
  - a. Are we the valued employee or beloved employer?
  - b. Are we the dependable student at school?
  - c. Are we busy in the vineyard of the Lord and do we appear to others that we are busy in the labors for Jesus Christ?

**Invitation:**

1. The first way in which we can show ourselves honest before God and our fellow man is to become a child of God, Acts 2:38.
2. Second, as Christians we can act like Christians in our worship, Christian service and Christian living, Eph. 5:8; Acts 8:22.

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# Heavy Loads and Life's Disappointments

## Matthew 11:28-30

**Thesis:** To encourage all to develop and maintain the best possible disposition or attitude despite sometimes often and severe disappointments in life.

**Song:** *Come Unto Me*

### **Introduction:**

1. There are many reasons for which and at different times in life that a person may be said to have a “heavy heart,” and there is often little that one can do to boost the spirits of one who has a heavy heart, Prov. 25:20.
2. Further, there is “a time to mourn,” Ecc. 3:4.
3. Friends will empathize with their fellows who are distraught over life's disappointments, Rom. 12:15.
4. There is, though, a breathtaking reason for which even something as heartbreaking as the death of loved ones ought to lift the fallen spirits of Christians, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

### **Body:**

- I. **Sometimes we think that we cannot bear any more of life's burdens and that we are at a breaking point.**
  - A. I have been there, and I think that we all have been there.
    1. Maybe like me when on occasion you “cannot take it anymore,” you simply make an audible, incomprehensible noise that hurts the throat and seems to rise from deep inside our being.
    2. But somehow, we get through the current crisis.
    3. Imagine the crises faced by poor Job, e.g. loss of all his children, loss of his property, loss of his health and discouraged by his wife and closest friends.
    4. Unlike Job, sometimes my Christian faith has faltered a little, Mark 9:24.
  - B. Jesus was literally “a man of sorrows,” Isa. 53:3.
    1. Our Lord experienced not only the excruciating and humiliating death of crucifixion, but he bore the sins of

all humanity of all time, 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:24.

2. Were we to be killed for our faith like the apostle James, we would not face the same duress Jesus faced on the cross bearing our sins, Acts 12:2; Matt. 27:46.
3. Jesus demonstrated and made it possible for humans to participate in life after death, at which time earthly sorrows will be no more, Rev. 21:4.

## **II. Sometimes there are burdens in life that are ongoing with no prospect of release from them.**

- A. Life's burdens and sorrows can virtually cripple us if we allow that to happen, Psa. 38:17.
  1. We can spend too much **down** time, getting ourselves down emotionally and spiritually, by dwelling on regrets and castigating the present.
  2. Our lives may be punctuated by goals unrealized and missed opportunities.
  3. However, the present and the small blip in history made by our lives is hardly to be compared with a glorious future in heavenly habitations, Rom. 8:18.
- B. Rather, life's burdens can be viewed as challenges, even opportunities for spiritual growth.

Sorrow or grief is necessary for discipline, for the development of the finer feelings and higher nature of the soul and spirit (Eccl 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad," margin "better"). (*ISBE*)

1. I know a brother in Christ who tries his best to look at every challenge and disappointment in life as an **opportunity**.
2. As far as I can tell, he does a pretty good job of doing just that.
3. We ought to be less concerned about what this life makes of us and more concerned in what we make out of this life (preparing ourselves to meet God), Amos 4:12.

## **III. Sometimes there are disappointments in life that didn't turn out the way we had hoped.**

- A. People, especially loved ones, can be a source of insurmountable disappointment in life.

1. The very ones from whom we ought to have derived great joy and satisfaction are often the one's who bring instead great sorrow into one's life, 2 Cor. 2:3.
  2. For instance, a morally unfaithful spouse can bring almost unimaginable heartache when instead there should have been an enduring foretaste of bliss on earth.
  3. A son or a daughter "gone bad" or a child from whom parents are involuntarily estranged is a hurt too deep it seems to fill.
- B. However, we must go on despite "great heaviness and continual sorrow," Rom. 9:2.
1. When family, friends, co-workers and brethren disappoint us, we must remember that God has not abandoned us, Jam. 5:11.
  2. For instance, we have the assurance that we will not be given more than we can handle; that's what gets me through the tough times of life, 1 Cor. 10:13.
  3. If we let him, Jesus will bear our heavy load, Matt. 11:28-30.
  4. In addition, some Christians likewise, in the spirit of Christ, will help us bear some of the burdens of this life that are beyond our capability to bear alone, Gal. 6:2.

**Conclusion:**

1. We must make the best of whatever it is that life throws our way, Matt. 10:28; Rev. 2:10.
2. Further, we must always be conscious of the fact that if we are faithful Christians, there is a better, eternal life coming that will make all we endure in this life relatively insignificant, John 14:1-3.

**Invitation:**

1. The comfort that we desperately need to traverse this life of frequent duress is heaven sent especially to Christians, 2 Cor. 1:3-4.
2. If you have acted out the words of Jesus Christ in your life, then you are a Christian, Mark 16:16.
3. If you are a Christian who sometimes has sinned (and all have sinned), but repented and prayed for forgiveness, God's comfort remains available to you as well, 1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22.

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# Marks of a Strong Church

## 1 Corinthians 16:13

**Thesis:** To encourage all-important goals for congregational growth into strong congregations.

**Songs:** *The Church Is One Foundation*

### **Introduction:**

1. For a few moments, we want to consider “Marks of a Strong Church.”
  - a. By a strong church, we mean a strong local congregation of the Lord’s church.
  - b. However, “strong” can mean various things to various people as well; what do we mean herein by “strong”?
2. In addition, a strong congregation may reflect that strength in several ways, including numbers.
  - a. However, a numerically strong church may be far from being a biblically or spiritually strong church.
  - b. Yet, often a biblically or spiritually strong church will also be strong numerically.
3. It is possible, though, for a congregation to be biblically or spiritually strong and be few in number.
  - a. Today, comparatively few people are sincerely interested in religion.
  - b. Even fewer are interested in God’s religion as revealed in the inspired Word of God.
4. The primary thoughts for this sermon are drawn from an article by brother Garland Elkins, longtime Gospel preacher, religious writer and Christian educator.
  - a. Let’s explore some ways by which a local congregation of the Lord’s church can be strong biblically and spiritually.
  - b. Further, let’s take opportunity through this sermon to encourage each of us to select all-important goals for congregational growth into a strong congregation of the Lord’s church.

### **Body:**

#### **I. A strong church has a converted membership.**

- A. Jesus found in his day that even religious people were

reluctant to be converted, Matt. 13:15.

1. The second recorded Gospel sermon called upon humanity to be converted, Acts 3:19.
  2. Conversion is so important that no one will enter heaven without it, Matt. 18:3.
- B. Jesus Christ did not come to earth simply to induct people into church membership.
1. Without Gospel conversion, even if claiming for oneself church membership, one is still lost.
  2. “Christians are a converted, or changed, people...” (Elkins).
- C. All congregations, even of the Lord’s church, evidence many within them who are far from converted by the Gospel.
1. Empty pews due to sporadic attendance or having to be coaxed to worship God at every opportunity speaks of the need for a real conversion by the Gospel.
  2. Allowing various activities (sports, school, social activities, etc.) to persistently relegate the Lord’s church to a less than primary consideration in one’s life softly whispers to brethren and the lost world, “I’m not really converted.”
  3. Participating in worldly pleasures (e.g., prom, social drinking, sensual activities, etc.) despite divine instruction to the contrary bespeaks of one’s lack of conversion by the Gospel.
- D. Imagine what a congregation would be like were every member to be thoroughly converted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
1. Nothing and no one in this life would be more important than the church of our Lord.
  2. No amount of money and no amount of time would be too much to spend on the Lord’s church.
  3. I have known people who were more devoted to their social club revolving around a bar, a dance floor and card tables than Christians who purport to be devoted to the Lord!

## **II. A strong church believes and obeys the Word of God without quibbling.**

- A. God has never allowed mankind to negotiate with him respecting his divine instruction.

1. Mankind has never been permitted by God to alter divine instruction, Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19.
  2. For people living today, the Gospel is God's power to save, Rom. 1:16.
  3. That Gospel is supposed to transform us from something ugly and sinful to something beautiful (on the inside at least) and forgiven, Rom. 12:1-2.
- B. Jesus Christ and his words are supposed to be the substance of our lives.
1. As a consequence of being in Christ, we are supposed to focus our attention on godly and heavenly matters, Col. 3:1-4.
  2. The words of Christ ought to be very important to us since by our attention to them or disregard for them our eternities will be decided, John 12:48.
  3. Jesus Christ only saves people with obedient faith, Heb. 5:9; Rom. 1:5; 16:26.
- C. Obeying the Word of God without quibbling means we won't look for loopholes to circumvent divine instruction that one finds distasteful or inconvenient.
1. We will not look for ways around what Jesus taught about marriage, divorce and remarriage, Matt. 5:32; 19:9.
  2. We will not look for new wisdom on old truths about the respective roles of men and women in the church, 1 Cor. 14:34.
  3. We will not look for new and imaginative tools of biblical interpretation to force Scripture to mean something today that it did not mean to its original recipients, 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21.

### **III. A strong church is a studious church.**

- A. Teaching and learning the Gospel is a life-long undertaking for every faithful member of the church.
1. Christians are those who have been taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by which they have been led to be baptized into Jesus Christ, Matt. 28:18-20.
  2. Christians also are those who after they have been taught the Gospel and baptized into Jesus Christ are taught more Gospel, Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 1:15.

3. Some of this learning is to be self-directed, at home, for instance, 2 Tim. 2:15.
- B. Christians must study the Word of God so that they can continue in the “apostles’ doctrine,” Acts 2:42.
  1. “Doctrine” is the correct subject of Gospel sermons, 2 Tim. 4:2.
  2. Christians must “search the Scriptures,” John 5:39.
  3. Christians are obligated to give strict attention to the doctrine of the Gospel, 1 Tim. 4:13.
- C. It is all too obvious that many Christians are not students of the Bible.
  1. Many Christians find it difficult to relate even the plan of salvation, which they obeyed, and especially were one to ask for biblical references.
  2. Biblical ignorance on a wide range of subjects becomes apparent through what Christians both say and do (or do not do).
  3. The Bible does not seem to be the underlying basis for what even many Christians believe, or often Christians cannot distinguish between biblical doctrine and local custom.

#### **IV. A strong church worships as it is written.**

- A. A strong church never forgets to whom the worship is directed.
  1. God alone is the object of acceptable worship, John 4:23-24.
  2. Consequently, God alone gets to set the acceptable avenues of worship, and everything else offered in worship is sinful vanity, Matt. 15:9.
- B. The way in which God wants people today to worship him is recorded in the New Testament alone.
  1. The first century church under inspired, apostolic guidance worshipped God in five ways.
  2. Worship of God in our age occurs through prayer, preaching or teaching, singing, giving a contribution and the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 14:15; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2.
- C. All other attempts to worship God are not authorized and thereby sinful.
  1. We cannot opt to add instrumental music into Christian

worship because we like it, since God specifically and explicitly authorized a certain kind of music—singing, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16.

2. We cannot observe the Lord’s Supper on any day other than the Lord’s Day because we have not New Testament authorization to do so, Acts 20:7.

**V. A strong church keeps itself unspotted from the world, Jam. 1:27.**

A. Faithful Christians practice holiness in their lives, Heb. 12:14.

1. Faithful Christians strive to be “pure in heart,” Matt. 5:8.
2. The lives of Christians are accented by godliness, Titus 2:12.

B. Strong Christians recognize how weak they are and that they sometimes commit sin, 1 John 1:8.

1. However, they do not live lives of sin, 1 John 3:9; “continues” NIV; “practices” NAS.
2. Godly Christians acknowledge sin in their lives and seek the divine remedy for their occasional sins, 1 John 1:9.

C. Christians cannot harbor pet sins in their lives and expect to be acceptable to God.

1. There is nothing that we should engage in our lives that we would be ashamed to be doing when Jesus Christ returns and time is no more.
2. Do we secretly read magazines or books, watch movies, play games, etc. that no Christian ought to read, watch or play?
3. It does not matter what the sin is or how harmless it may seem to us, it only takes a single sin—any sin—to keep a soul out of heaven, Rev. 21:8; Rom. 6:23.

**VI. A strong church will edify itself.**

A. Edification—or to build itself up in the holy faith—is one of the missions of the Lord’s church, 1 Cor. 14:12.

1. “Edifying of the body of Christ” ought to be the worthy pursuit of every child of God, Eph. 4:12.
2. Everything done by one or by all ought to be with the edification of the Lord’s church in mind, 1 Cor. 14:26.

B. Faithful Christians endeavor to edify each other, Rom. 14:19.

1. Sometimes there are fine points in the Gospel of which we may not be aware, Acts 18:26.
  2. Edification also is necessary for Christian unity, Eph. 4:12-13.
- C. Typically, several venues exist within local congregation for the edification of the church.
1. Edification is the reason we have public Bible classes (e.g., Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, ladies' Bible classes, VBS, children's class Sunday evenings).
  2. Edification is a chief reason to have Gospel meetings, lectureships and seminars.
  3. Articles in church bulletins and provision of Gospel magazines are for the purpose of edification.

**VII. A strong church will do good unto all men.**

- A. Benevolence is one of the missions of the Lord's church.
1. Twice the apostle Paul specified that the church's benevolence is to be toward Christians and non-Christians with a preference for helping Christians first, 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 6:10.
  2. The occasion for the Lord's Day collection by which we are authorized to worship God this way was for benevolence, 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 11:28-29; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 2:10.
- B. It is a mark of a weak church that will not do good unto **all men**.
1. It is a wicked and warped sense of religion to withhold benevolence toward men, women or children who are not Christians.
  2. Even the benevolence of God regarding his providence respecting the natural world intends to include non-Christians, Matt. 5:44-48.

**VIII. A strong church practices love.**

- A. A strong church loves the church of the Lord.
1. That means that faithful Christians love each other with the highest form of love, 1 Pet. 2:17.
  2. Christians ought to love fellow Christians in a way far superior for one's affection for others outside of the Christian faith, Rom. 12:10.
  3. Christian love ought to be unflinching and dependable,

Heb. 13:1.

- B. A strong church will be motivated by love.
  - 1. Love will be the motivation for preaching the Gospel truth to saint and sinner, Eph. 4:15.
  - 2. Love will motivate Christians in every respect to their interaction with fellow Christians and the world, 1 Cor. 16:14.
- C. Love among Christians and toward the world is the badge of Christian discipleship, John 13:35.
  - 1. The love of Christians for Christians ought to be unparalleled, 1 Pet. 4:8.
  - 2. Lack of love for especially brethren betrays a Christian as defective, 1 John 2:10-11; 3:14.

**IX. A strong church is a united church.**

- A. Jesus prayed for Christian unity, John 17:20-21.
  - 1. Unity derives from common mindedness respecting the revealed will of God, 1 Cor. 1:10.
  - 2. Paul reiterated to the Philippian Christians that they be “like minded,” Phil. 2:2.
- B. Unity is based on the revealed Word of God, Eph. 4:11-14.
  - 1. There are cardinal doctrines of Christianity at the center of Christian unity, Eph. 4:4-6.
  - 2. Yet, all the substance of Christianity clearly revealed in what we call the Bible is necessary of Christianity unity to result, 2 John 9-11; Acts 20:27.
- C. “Unity” differs from “union.”
  - 1. Agreeing to disagree is not biblical unity.
  - 2. Association or recognition of virtues is not the same as Christian unity.

**X. A strong church has a scriptural and efficient eldership.**

- A. Every fully developed local congregation will have its own qualified eldership.
  - 1. A plurality of men meeting divine specifications is God’s plan for local, congregational leadership (and responsibility), 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.
  - 2. A congregation is out of order until elders are appointed, Titus 1:5.
- B. An eldership is efficient when it takes seriously the responsibility God assigns to it in the New Testament.
  - 1. Elders must keep themselves qualified.

2. Elders must be “examples to the flock,” 1 Pet. 5:3 NKJV.
  3. Elders must give an account to God for each soul in the congregation over which they serve, Heb. 13:17.
- C. The guidance offered a congregation by elders includes making decisions that are expedient for the congregation.
1. Of course, no one can alter or make new rules for God, including elders.
  2. However, elders must decide how best to “feed the church of God,” Acts 20:28; this may include arranging for Bible classes, preaching, Gospel meetings, etc.
  3. A congregation has the responsibility to work with godly elders who charged before God with care of the congregation.

**XI. A strong church will preach the Gospel to sinner and saint.**

- A. God has determined that preaching is the primary way in which the Gospel is to be circulated among sinners and saints, Rom. 10:13-15.
1. The Great Commission involves preaching the Gospel to non-Christians throughout the world, Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16.
  2. The Gospel, though, is for Christians as well, Rom. 1:15.
- B. Preaching is a weighty responsibility.
1. Preaching God’s Word must occur irrespective of whether those who hear the Gospel appreciate either the divine message or the messenger, 2 Tim. 4:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:13.
  2. Godly preachers feel the compulsion to preach the Gospel of Christ, 1 Cor. 9:16; Jer. 20:9.
- C. Preaching is the most important vocation on the planet, except for the combined responsibility of an eldership.
1. Leaders of nations affect economies and temporal lives, but preaching the Gospel affects not only lives on earth but potentially throughout eternity.
  2. Nothing is more precious than a single soul, Matt. 16:26.
  3. Inept or lazy preachers are not worth whatever they may be paid, but faithful preachers cannot be

compensated enough for the good they do and responsibility that is theirs, 1 Cor. 9:4-14.

## **XII. A strong church will have qualified deacons and teachers.**

- A. Deacons serve the church as special servants.
  - 1. Like elders, they, too, must meet divine qualifications, 1 Tim. 3:8-13.
  - 2. Deacons specialize in service areas related to the church, Acts 6:1-7.
  - 3. Deacons contributed directly to the growth of the church in Jerusalem by permitting the apostle-preachers to specialize in preaching and teaching the Gospel.
  - 4. Deacons also contributed to the growth of the Jerusalem church by alleviating the concerns of the congregation for needful activity being performed that was not being attended without them.
- B. A church can hardly advance in biblical and spiritual strength without a contingent of qualified Bible class teachers.
  - 1. There was a shortage of mature Christian teachers in the first century church, Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2.
  - 2. Teaching teachers is one of the responsibilities of those who would teach, 2 Tim. 2:2.
- C. Other special servants besides deacons and teachers aid the church to be strong.
  - 1. Phoebe was an unspecified type of special servant to the church, Rom. 16:1.
  - 2. Everybody can do something, and one does not need a title to be useful to the Lord in a local, congregational setting.
  - 3. Preacher, elder, deacon, teacher are more descriptions of responsibilities than titles, Matt. 23:8; Gen. 13:8.

### **Conclusion:**

- 1. To be spiritually strong is a worthy goal for each Christian and for each congregation of the Lord's church, 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:10; 2 Tim. 2:1.
- 2. Selecting all-important goals for congregational growth into a strong congregation of the Lord's church is something in which each of us can participate.
- 3. If each of us opt for a biblically and spiritually strong

congregation, beginning with ourselves, then collectively we will pursue together that noble goal.

4. Numerical strength cannot substitute for biblical and spiritual strength, but biblical and spiritual strength will contribute to numerical strength as well.
5. A strong church begins with one—everyone!
6. A biblically and spiritually strong church abides in the Gospel of Christ—and it shows!

**Invitation:**

1. Neither unbaptized believers nor unfaithful Christians contribute to a strong church.
2. Why not be baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and contribute to the strength of the church, Gal. 3:27; Acts 22:16?
3. Why not be restored to faithful service if you are an erring child of God, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9?

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# Soul and Spirit

## Hebrews 4:12

**Thesis:** To briefly explain the meanings of the biblical words “soul” and “spirit.”

**Song:** *Where the Soul Never Dies*

### **Introduction:**

1. Many years ago, I heard a Gospel preacher announce his intention to make a Bible translation where each Hebrew or Greek word would be translated into English consistently by a single corresponding word.
  - a. For instance, an original language word that can mean “bread” always would be translated “bread” and would not be translated at any time “loaf.”
  - b. On the surface, this sounds like an excellent way to more clearly understand God’s Word translated from Hebrew and Greek to another language, e.g. “English.”
  - c. However, the brother’s statement was both naïve and impractical, not to mention counterproductive to understanding the Bible text.
2. Presumably in every language, the meanings of words often depend as much on **the context** in which they occur as they do on the root or elementary meaning of those words.
  - a. This is true respecting the Hebrew and Greek.
  - b. It is no less true respecting the English language, e.g. “love,” which meaning, depending upon its context, might be clarified by substituting such words as “like” (ice cream), “passion” (romantically inclined), “ardor” (devoted to a cause, zeal or enthusiasm), “affection” (mild appreciation), “adoration” (worship), “erotic,” etc.
3. Therefore, it takes the etymology (the history of a word’s meaning) and context (how a word is being used presently in a certain frame of reference) to determine what any word under consideration means.
  - a. This is true regarding the words “soul” and “spirit.”

- b. Consequently, it is appropriate to use a variety of words in the language to which the Bible is being translated to accurately represent what a given word means in its context.
- 4. The words “soul” and “spirit” in the Bible can be especially problematic even for serious students of the Bible.
  - a. Hugo McCord remarked, “Many of us have read enough to be resigned to the fact that we shall leave this life with unanswered questions about the soul and spirit.”
  - b. T. Pierce Brown quotes David Lipscomb: “You have a pretty tough and gristly piece of meat for a babe to masticate and digest if you undertake to define the difference between soul and spirit.”
  - c. All agree, though, that we can and should understand some things about the words “soul” and “spirit.”

### Body:

#### I. Let’s consider the word “soul.”

- A. The Old Testament word for “soul” is *nephesh* (neh’-fesh).

The Hebrew word *nephesh* admits of a variety of translation, and one must be extremely careful not to give a specific meaning to a word which has such a wide scope of meanings and apply it in every instance where the term is used. ...In over 400 of its approximately 700 appearances in the Old Testament, *nephesh* is translated “soul” by the King James Version. (Pryor 33)

- 1. “...the word ‘nephesh’ is translated about thirty-three different ways... Thus it depends on where and how a word is used to determine its meaning” (Hearn 63).
- 2. “The elemental meaning of the word ‘soul’ (*nephesh*) is that which breathes...” (McCord).
- B. The New Testament word for “soul” is *psuche* (psoo-khay’).
  - 1. Commenting on Hebrews 4:12, Albert Barnes says of the word “soul” means “[t]he animal life from [or contrasted with] the immortal soul.”
  - 2. Guy N. Woods writes of the ordinary and usual meaning of the word “soul”: “What is the soul? Literally, it is life...Essentially, and in unfigurative usage, it is the ‘vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing’ (Thayer), and is always to be distinguished from the spirit, **when so used**”

(emphasis added).

3. Summarized, “[a] consideration of **every** passage in which these terms are used leads us to the conclusion that the term “soul” is a term that was applied in the Bible to every being that normally has sensory capacities (life)... (Brown).
- C. There are notable exceptions in both testaments to the use of the word “soul” to represent the life-force that makes breathing creatures of either animals or humans.
1. Leviticus 17:11 uses “soul” respecting the “spirit” for which atonement was made; see also Ezek. 18:20.
  2. Hebrews 13:17 is a case in point where the use of “soul” (*psuche*) refers not to the breathing life of either an animal or a human, but to the immortal spirit of humans’ see also Matt. 16:26.

Though sometimes the word “soul” biblically means a breathing creature, yet when one converts a sinner from the error of his way, and saves “a soul from death” (Jas. 5:20), it cannot be fairly said that he saves the sinner’s breath. Likewise, any interpretation of (I Pet. 1: 9, 22) making the word “soul” anything less than man’s eternal nature has to be false. (McCord, *Spiritual Sword* 18)

## II. Let’s consider the word “spirit.”

- A. The Old Testament word for “spirit” is *ruwach* (roo’-akh).
1. W.E. Vine says of *ruwach*: “First, this word means ‘breath,’ air for breathing, air that is being breathed.”
  2. However, *ruwakh*, in context, also represents the immortal spirit of either God or mankind, Gen. 1:2; Ecc. 12:7.
- B. The New Testament word for “spirit” is *pneuma* (pnyoo’-mah).
1. Vine says of *pneuma* that it “primarily denotes ‘the wind’ (akin to pneo, ‘to breathe, blow’); also ‘breath’; then, especially ‘the spirit,’ which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and powerful.”
  2. Depending upon the context, *pneuma* may refer to “the Spirit of God” or the immortal spiritual side of mankind, Matt. 3:16; 4:1; 26:41; Acts 7:59.

### III. Summarized, how shall we distinguish between “soul” and “spirit”?

- A. Sometimes the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably to refer to spiritual nature, not the material body or the germ of life (breathing).

Clearly the words “soul” and “spirit” are sometimes used interchangeably, referring to man’s non-material and immortal nature. But Hebrews 4:12 shows that the words “soul” and “spirit” are not always synonyms. The word “spirit” is never used to refer to a whole person... (McCord, *Gospel Gazette*)

- B. Typically, though, in either testament, the word “soul” refers to the alive, breathing being rather than to spiritual nature.
1. Consequently, “...the context of nephesh in Genesis 2:7 (including Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 26, 30) shows that Moses was saying that man, like the fishes, the birds, the beasts, and creeping things, is a living breather. ...the NASB has ‘man became a living being.’” (McCord, *Gospel Gazette*).
  2. However, “soul” in the Old Testament can refer to either the alive, breathing being or spiritual nature, depending upon the context.
  3. “Three times in Leviticus 17:11 the Lord used the word nephesh with two different meanings; twice nephesh means ‘life’ and once nephesh (plural) means ‘souls,’ our immortal nature” (McCord, *Gospel Gazette*).
- C. The word “spirit” in either testament universally refers to spiritual nature rather than either the material part of humanity or the alive, breathing part of humanity.
1. That is, unless in the context the word usually translated spirit refers instead to the wind or one’s breath.
  2. However, in a context where either the reference pertains to the life-force or the immortal, spiritual side, “soul” refers to the life-force and “spirit” refers to the immortal, spiritual side.

The soul, **as it relates to man** is a generic term; the spirit, a specific one. **In such a frame of reference** it is

easy to define the spirit. It is the immortal nature infused directly from God (Hebrews 12:8-9). The soul, being generic, relies on the context to indicate its meaning... (Guy N. Woods in *Gospel Advocate*, June 14, 1979 qtd. in Brown emphasis added)

### **Conclusion:**

1. The word “**soul**” (whether translated from Hebrew or Greek) may refer to the life aspect of an animal or a human, or it may refer to the spiritual side of a person’s existence, **depending upon the context** in which it occurs.
2. Consequently, the Hebrew or Greek that is sometimes translated “soul” is often translated by other English words: “living creature,” Gen. 1:20; “life,” Gen. 19:17; “mind,” Gen. 23:8; “persons,” Gen. 36:6; “life,” Matt. 2:20; “minds,” Acts 14:2; “heart,” Eph. 6:6, etc.
3. The word “spirit” (whether translated from the Hebrew or Greek) never refers to the life aspect of an animal or a human, but it always refers to the spiritual side of a human or God, unless in the Old Testament the context refers to neither life-force or the spiritual side, “wind,” Gen. 8:1.
4. Finally, it is sufficient to remember that living humans are body (material), life (breathing) and spirit (spiritual), Heb. 4:12.
5. Brother McCord writes: “One gets his body from his parents, but it is ‘the Father of spirits’ (Hebrews 12:9) who ‘forms the spirit of man within him’ (Zechariah 12:1). When death comes to man’s physical body, then his ‘spirit will return to God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7)” (*Gospel Gazette*).

### **Invitation:**

1. Have you committed your living, spirit-filled body to the service of Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 6:20?
2. Baptizing the body in obedience to Christ’s command washes the spirit within that body, Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21.
3. If you are out of Christian service, you can return your body to service of Jesus Christ by repentance and prayer, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# How God Calls Men

## 2 Thessalonians 2:14

**Thesis:** To explore in the Bible how and for what reason God calls men today.

**Song:** *God Is Calling the Prodigal; Jesus Calls Us*

### **Introduction:**

1. Indisputably, God calls humanity, but how does he call humanity?
  - a. Does God whisper our names, or maybe in a booming voice call us by name?
  - b. Does a shining light in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time or with an unexpected distortion represent a calling by God (that we must subjectively assess)?
  - c. For what purpose purposes does God call humanity?
  - d. Further, is God's call irresistible?
2. We need to realize that personal feelings are not the standard of authority to which we ought to appeal in religious matters.
  - a. Personal feelings can be wrong, Prov. 16:25.
  - b. Through personal feelings we would be unable to ascertain to whose call we were responding for induction into what we know not.
  - c. Rather than to personal feelings or human subjectivity, mankind needs to appeal exclusively to Bible authority about how and for what reason God calls men today.

### **Body:**

- I. **It is a fact that God calls humanity.**
  - A. First, God calls humanity out of the darkness of sin into the light of righteousness, 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 13:43.
  - B. Secondly, God calls upon those who respond to his call to continue responding to his call, 1 Thess. 2:12.
  - C. Scripture variously describes God's calling of humanity ("His calling," Eph. 1:8 NKJV).
    1. It is described as "your calling," Eph. 4:4.
    2. It is "the high calling of God in Jesus Christ," Phil. 3:14.
    3. It is "an holy calling," 2 Tim. 1:9.
    4. It is "the heavenly calling," Heb. 3:1.

## **II. For what purpose does God call humanity?**

- A. The chief reason that God calls humanity is that humans may be saved from sin, 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:9.
- B. This means that God calls humanity to “holiness,” 1 Thess. 4:7.
- C. God calls humanity into “his kingdom,” 1 Thess. 2:12.
- D. God calls humanity into “his eternal glory,” 1 Pet. 5:10.
- E. God calls humanity into “the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,” 1 Cor. 1:9.
- F. God calls humanity “into the grace of Christ,” Gal. 1:6.

## **III. How does God call humanity?**

- A. Must humanity guess at how God calls people living today?
  - 1. Does God whisper our names, or maybe in a booming voice call us by name?
  - 2. Does a shining light in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time or with an unexpected distortion represent a calling by God (that we must subjectively assess)?
  - 3. Must humanity rely on fallible, human subjectivity to ascertain if, when and into what God calls people living today?
- B. God once called some people directly to be prophets or apostles, but he does not call people audibly or directly in any way today.
  - 1. Abraham, for instance, was called miraculously by God, Heb. 11:8.
  - 2. Miracles, though, have concluded because they served the purpose for which they existed, Mark 16:20; 1 Cor. 13:8-13.
  - 3. Hence, God calls no one today miraculously or directly.
- C. Incidentally, God has never called anyone with an irresistible calling.
  - 1. Calvinism, popular across denominational lines of fellowship, teaches of God’s irresistible grace
  - 2. Irresistible grace is a false, biblically unsubstantiated doctrine.
  - 3. By and large, the Jewish nation of the first century resisted the calling of God, Acts 7:51.
- D. How, then, does God call mankind today?

1. There is only one way through which God calls anyone today.
2. Only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ does God call anyone, 2 Thess. 2:14.
3. Anyone that is called by the Gospel is only called according to the purpose of God, Rom. 8:28.

**Conclusion:**

1. Fact: God calls humanity.
2. Fact: God has a purpose for calling humanity.
3. Fact: God calls humanity today exclusively through the Gospel of Christ.
4. (I am indebted for points in this sermon to a fine article by Roger Campbell.)

**Invitation:**

1. The Gospel of Jesus Christ by which humanity is called of God is God's power for the salvation of souls, Rom. 1:16.
2. Have you responded yet to the Gospel call, Acts 2:38?
3. Do you need to respond to the Gospel call once more, 1 John 1:9?

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# Who Do You Say That I Am?

## Matthew 16:13-17

**Thesis:** To encourage especially Christians to live their lives as though acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, **really means something** to them.

**Songs:** *The World's Bible; I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord*

### Introduction:

1. I am indebted to Phil Sanders and his article in *Think* magazine for some key thoughts around which I molded this lesson.
2. Respecting the text of Matt. 16:13-17, brother Sanders began his article with the affirmation: "The most important question you will ever answer is 'Who do you say that I am?'" (6).
3. Let me suggest that there is who we identify Jesus to be by our **words**, but it is quite possible that we essentially answer our Lord's question to Peter very differently **by the way we conduct ourselves**.
4. Who is Jesus of Nazareth? Do our words and our actions tell the same thing?

### Body:

#### I. Who do we say that Jesus is by the way we live our lives?

- A. Who do we say that Jesus is by the words that come out of our mouths?
  1. Does our speech identify us as followers of Jesus or betray us as followers of the devil, Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:8; 2 Pet. 2:7?
  2. Do we tell and appreciate *dirty jokes*, Eph. 5:4 NKJV?
  3. Is our language punctuated and well-seasoned with profanity, Rom. 12:14; Jam. 3:10?
  4. Are we remembered by others for our angry words, Matt. 5:22?
  5. Is there really any discernible difference between the way we talk and the things about which we talk than the way unrighteous people talk and the things about which they talk?

- B. Who do we say that Jesus is by the way we conduct ourselves, Phil. 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:15 “manner of life” ASV; “conduct” NKJV?
1. Do our neighbors know that we are Christians, 1 Tim. 4:12 “manner of life” ASV; “conduct” NKJV?
  2. Do our co-workers or fellow students know that we are Christians, 1 Pet. 2:12 “behavior” ASV; “conduct” NKJV?
  3. Do our family members sometimes forget that we are Christians?
  4. Is there anyone who knows you who would be surprised to discover that you profess to be a Christian, 1 Pet. 3:16 “good manner of life in Christ” ASV; “good conduct in Christ” NKJV?
- C. Who do we say that Jesus is when someone asks us about our religious convictions?
1. Are we ashamed of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, Rom. 1:16?
  2. Have we studied God’s Word sufficiently to give honest Bible answers to any who would inquire of us about the Christianity we endeavor to practice, 1 Pet. 3:15?
  3. Do what we *preach* and what we *practice* agree with each other?
  4. The motto, “Do as I say, not as I do,” is failed theology and speaks of no religious conviction, 1 Cor. 11:1.
- D. Jesus’ words in Luke 6:46 come to mind.
1. If Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, certainly the words rolling off our tongues in our daily speech will be compatible with our Christian profession.
  2. If Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, the places we go and the things that we do will correspond to divine instruction in the Gospel of Christ.
  3. If Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, there are places we will not go and things that we will not do because they are counter to divine instruction in the New Testament.

## II. Who do we say that Jesus is when it is time to worship God or attend Bible study?

- A. Who do we say that Jesus is by assembling for worship when God's people assemble for worship, Heb. 10:25?
  - 1. When we are present at every opportunity we have to worship God with fellow Christians, we affirm to the world that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives as the Son of God.
  - 2. If we fail to assemble regularly with God's people for worship, what are we really saying about the influence of Jesus Christ on us?
  - 3. Worshipping God has always been a delight for faithful children of God, Psa. 122:1.
- B. Who do we say that Jesus is by studying God's Word together in a Bible class?
  - 1. When we are present at every opportunity we have to gather with God's people for Bible study, we affirm to the world that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives as the Son of God.
  - 2. If we fail to avail ourselves regularly of Bible study with God's people, what are we really saying about the influence of Jesus Christ on us, Acts 17:11?
  - 3. We must study God's Word, 1 Tim. 2:15.
- C. Jesus' words in Luke 6:46 come to mind again.
  - 1. If Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, we will make every effort to assemble with fellow Christians at every worship time.
  - 2. If Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, we will seize every opportunity to study our Bibles alone as well as gathered with other Christians at designated times of Bible study.
  - 3. If Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of our lives as the Son of God, there is no place that we would rather be when it is time for Bible class or worship than with the people of God, Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 2:17.

### Conclusion:

- 1. We agree with brother Sanders when he stated: "When Christians confess Jesus as the Lord, the Christ, and the Son of God, **it must mean something in the way that they live. He must be Lord all the time and in every matter**" (7 emphasis added).

2. Furthermore, “[p]eople see Jesus as weak and ineffective in making changes in the lives of people” (Sanders 7) whenever it appears that Jesus has made so little difference in the lives of Christians.
  - a. Individual Christians and congregations of the Lord’s church that fail to demonstrate true Christianity shout down every good Gospel sermon.
  - b. Individual Christians and congregations that fail to demonstrate true Christianity discount or mark down the cost of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross for the redemption of humanity.
  - c. Brother Sanders gave one tell-tale example of devalued Christianity: “Churches that cease from worship to watch the Super Bowl, to watch Wrestle Mania, or to celebrate Christmas at home can hardly argue that they give Jesus first place in everything (Col. 1:18)” (7).
  - d. Really, the examples that could be put forth in the lives of Christians and congregations would be innumerable.
3. **“If we are determined to influence the world for Jesus, we must first show the world that the Lord has already influenced us”** (Sanders 7 emphasis added).

**Invitation:**

1. Has the Lord Jesus influenced you enough to obey the Gospel of Christ, Mark 16:16?
2. Has the Lord Jesus influenced you enough to be a faithful Christian, Rev. 2:10?

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# Having Food and Clothing Let Us Therewith Be Content

## 1 Timothy 6:6-10

**Thesis:** To emphasize that our material priorities ought to be modest, especially contrasted with our pursuit of godliness.

**Song:** *Is My Name Written There?*

### Introduction:

1. The word in 1 Tim. 6:8 translated “raiment” in the KJV, “covering” in the ASV and “clothing” in the NKJV “means house or lodging, as well as clothing” (Clarke; see also Bauer, Gingrich and Danker).
  - a. “Food, clothing and shelter are the three basic needs of mankind; and all three are included here” (Coffman).
  - b. According to divine inspiration, human contentment ought to manifest itself when one’s **needs** are met, as opposed to his mere wants and desires that exceed need.
2. First Tim. 6:8 would have Christians to be content with the basic necessities of life, cf. Heb. 13:5 NKJV.
  - a. Contentment means to “be satisfied” (Bauer, Gingrich and Danker).
  - b. “[I]f we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us” (Louw and Nida).

What we eat and what we wear is all the material good we get out of riches. [What else may be granted should be received with thanksgiving. Still it is not absolutely necessary, and the earnest and devout Christian will be satisfied when his actual needs are supplied.] (Lipscomb and Shepherd)
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3. Determining to **set as one’s chief goal in life** the acquisition of much more than one’s needs invites soul-injuring greed, 1 Tim. 6:9-10.

- a. The apostle Paul simply restated a principle that Jesus Christ already established during his earthly ministry, Matt. 16:26.
- b. The physical blessings in this life over which mankind often frets do not deserve man's acute attention, Matt. 6:25-34.

**Body:**

**I. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: "Having the best or the most food and the most expensive or the most clothing therewith be content."**

- A. Can a person have too much food or too much rich food?
  1. Everyone must eat to stay alive and healthy, but **contentment** respecting food ought to correspond to **need**, Prov. 30:8-9 ASV.
  2. The child of God should control his appetite, especially respecting "delicacies," Prov. 23:1-3 NKJV.
  3. Of course, one is not limited to only the food needed to fuel the body, but contentment ought to derive from food needed for the body rather than whatever is beyond need.
- B. Can a person have too many pairs of shoes or too many clothes?
  1. Imelda Marcos, wife of the 10<sup>th</sup> president of the Philippines, purportedly had about 3,000 pairs of shoes, though she claimed that she really owned 1,060 pairs of shoes ("Imelda").
  2. The servant of Elisha coveted changes of clothes and was rewarded with leprosy, 2 Kings 5:21-27.
  3. Certainly, especially in an affluent society such as ours, we may have several changes of clothes, but contentment ought to correspond to when our need for clothing has been met, and any more that we have should be counted as an added blessing.

**II. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: "Having the most lavish house therewith be content."**

- A. Over the years, I have imagined a dream house for my family and me, especially for Bonnie and me.
  1. Once, I imagined a little white house with a white picket fence edging a green lawn.
  2. For many years, I have admired log homes and think I would like to live in one, especially if it were in a wooded, country setting.

3. More recently, I have favored a ranch style, one level living due to the pains stairs sometimes cause in my knees.
  4. However, I am embarrassed when I think that I may not have fully appreciated the abundance I enjoy and have enjoyed through the years in blessed America, wherever my family and I have lived.
- B. The American Dream includes home ownership.
1. The Fannie Mae company, responsible for many people achieving the American dream of home ownership, has as its motto: “Our business is the American Dream.”
  2. The American Dream respecting home ownership is icing on the cake, extra and beyond simply having a place to reside.
  3. Jesus Christ once remarked that he did not have a home, Luke 9:58.
- C. Many wealthy people (e.g., sports figures, movie stars, extremely successful business people, etc.) have mansions that tower in grandeur far beyond the richest palaces of the ancient world.
1. For instance, one of the most lavish houses in this country is owned by Bill Gates, billionaire founder of Microsoft.
  2. Whereas the average American home is about 2,000 square feet, the Gates home is 40,000 square feet, took seven years to build and appraises at \$113,000,000 (property tax is \$1,000,000 annually) (Agarwal).
  3. We ought to be content when our need for a place to live is met, and thank God for the added blessing if we have more than that.

**III. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: “Having a shiny, new car (or truck) therewith be content.”**

- A. There is nothing necessarily wrong with having a car or a truck.
- B. However, cars and trucks are in a different class than the necessities of life—food, clothes and shelter.
- C. Cars and trucks can serve useful purposes and we ought to be thankful if we have either.
- D. However, new vehicles or even old vehicles on which we

may spend inordinate amounts of time and money have to do with the gravy in life, not the essentials, and ought to be regarded as such.

**IV. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: “Having a nice boat therewith be content.”**

- A. The only God-authorized and specified *boat* was Noah’s ark!
- B. Jesus Christ also used boats on occasion at the Sea of Galilee.
- C. Luxury possessions such as boats have to do with the gravy or extras in life, not essentials, and ought to be regarded as such.

**V. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: “Having the latest audio, video technology and computer equipment therewith be content.”**

- A. Of course, some of the latest techno gadgets can be used in the work of the Lord’s church, e.g. sermon preparation, radio and TV sermons, etc.
- B. Luxury possessions, though, such as the latest audio, video technology and computer equipment have to do with the gravy in life, not essentials, and ought to be regarded as such.

**VI. Paul by inspiration did not write to Timothy: “Having the newest gaming station or ATV therewith be content.”**

- A. Agreed, toys of all sizes for boys and girls of all ages may contribute to much needed recreation.
- B. Jesus Christ himself sometime sought a holiday from the toil of his ministry, John 6:15.
- C. However, recreation (even my model trains or computer games) have to do with the gravy of life and ought to be regarded as such.

**VII. Of course, one could go on endlessly simply specifying any of a number of things on which even Christians spend an inordinate amount of time and money, which may displace seeking spiritual things first in our lives, Matt. 6:33.**

**Conclusion:**

- 1. Moderate prosperity usually serves the child of God much better than either poverty or riches, Prov. 30:8-9.
- 2. Most of the things to which we devote the most attention and money simply do not deserve the investment of time or money we spend on them.

3. We will never have enough when our life's goal is the acquisition of more and more stuff.
4. After we acquire the basic necessities for our families and ourselves, most of our attention needs to be spent respecting spiritual matters, Matt. 6:33.

**Invitation:**

1. There is a contentment in being saved from one's sins that exceeds any contentment available to an unsaved person.
2. Experience the contentment of salvation by obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9.
3. Erring Christians cannot really find contentment in this life while estranged from our Lord, 1 John 1:9.

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# Opened the Door of Faith

## Acts 14:27

**Thesis:** To rehearse the path that leads to salvation versus false starts toward salvation of the soul.

**Song:** *Come to Jesus Today*

### **Introduction:**

1. Mankind seems to have an innate awareness of human deficiency for which he seeks pardon.
2. If mankind doesn't worship the true, living God of the universe, he'll worship something, even if it's a rock or part of the created universe, Rom. 1:25.
3. Many sincere souls like the Samaritans in Jesus' day worship God but erroneously, John 4.
4. Others simply make up their religion as they go along, like children playing games, Rom. 10:1-3.
5. Countless souls throughout history into the present have made many false starts toward the salvation of their souls, Acts 19:1-7.
6. The apostle Paul, though, rehearsed to various congregations the true salvation enjoyed by the Gentiles, Acts 14:27; 9; 22; 26.

### **Body:**

#### **I. I have made many false starts throughout my life toward the salvation of my soul.**

- A. In my early life through my late teen years I was a Roman Catholic.
  1. I was born into a Catholic family and in the truest sense inherited my religion like the Jews of the Old Testament.
  2. My parents were neither devoted Catholics nor really very religious at all.
  3. My Catholic upbringing was largely the influence of my Rushmore grandparents and summertime instruction I received from the nuns in exchange for the Catholic Church not otherwise troubling my parents.
  4. Doubtless, the Catholic Church still considers me a

Catholic, howbeit, not a very good one, owing to the Catholic conviction of “Born a Catholic, die a Catholic.”

- B. Hypocrisy I viewed in my Catholic family (parents and grandparents) led me to look for the one, true church.
  - 1. I had no idea of where to look for the one, true church or how to recognize it were I to find it.
  - 2. First, my brother Larry and I visited a session of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship and participated in men’s prayer breakfasts, but the hypocrisy (really fraud) discovered in telling me what to say to appear to be speaking in tongues discouraged interest in charismatic religion.
  - 3. A former girlfriend and I worshipped with a Pentecostal church which was bigger on social interaction than on religious experience or conviction, which did not really address salvation at all.
  - 4. Bonnie and I responded (Bonnie responded and I followed her) to the front of a denominational church gathering “to be saved,” but the subjectivity and short-lived euphoric feeling derived could not pass for salvation.
- C. Quite accidentally (or providentially I firmly believe), I came in contact with a deacon in the Lord’s church who led me to Christ with certainty.
  - 1. A series of events over which I had little to no control led me into a USAF classroom with a deacon in the church of Christ as my teacher.
  - 2. Six weeks later, after studying intensely in the evening hours, I obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ by being baptized for the remission of my sins.
  - 3. I knew that what I was doing would take away my sins because God’s Book—the Bible—said so in numerous New Testament passages.
  - 4. Confidence respecting the salvation of my soul was possible because God through the Bible stated in black and white his promise to save obedient souls.

## **II. One can know assuredly, without doubt how to be saved from his or her sins.**

- A. If one has any doubt whatsoever whether mankind left to

himself is lost in sin, he need only consult God's Book—the Bible.

1. All souls have committed sin, Rom. 3:10, 23; 1 John 1:8.
  2. Souls that are guilty of sin when they pass from this life or when Jesus Christ comes again will be eternally lost, Rom. 6:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9.
  3. However, only souls who are accountable for themselves have the guilt of sin assigned to them by God, Matt. 18:3; 19:14.
- B. The only assurance one can have that his sins are removed is by consulting God's Book—the Bible— especially the New Testament.
1. Only persons able to comprehend and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ (not babies, small children and the mentally infirm) need concern themselves with the salvation of their souls, Rom. 10:17.
  2. The road to salvation in the Gospel begins with believing or having faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, John 8:24.
  3. The road to salvation in the Gospel includes repenting or turning from one's sins, Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 6:9-11.
  4. The road to salvation in the Gospel includes telling others of one's confidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10.
  5. The road to salvation from one's past sins culminates obediently being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Acts 22:16.
- C. Not subjectivity or manmade say so's, but the written Word of God confirms the salvation of souls that are truly saved.
1. We can know that we know that we are saved, if we have followed divine instruction for salvation that we can plainly read in the New Testament, 1 John 2:3.
  2. Further, we know that even when we Christians sin, God is ready to forgive us upon our repentance, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.
  3. Faithful obedience on our part will be rewarded with a crown of eternal life, 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10.

**Conclusion:**

1. Salvation cannot be inherited.
2. Salvation is not experimental.
3. Salvation is not manmade.
4. True salvation is definitively discernible from divine instruction in the New Testament.

**Invitation:**

1. Have you enacted in your life the plan of salvation that appears upon the pages of inspiration in the New Testament?
2. Have you been baptized, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21?
3. Having been baptized, are you a faithful child of God, Rev. 2:10?

# Is Jesus Christ an Historical Person?

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-26

**Thesis:** In view that enemies of God, the Bible and the church deny that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real person but rather merely a myth, to demonstrate from various sources of evidence that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) actually lived and died in first century Palestine.

**Song:** *Wonderful Man of Galilee*

### **Introduction:**

1. Some pretty otherwise smart people sometimes say some pretty dumb and baseless things.
2. To deny the historicity of Jesus Christ or that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real, historical person is about the dumbest and most baseless assertion that anyone could make.
3. It matters not that a person who may be saying such a thing is a highly educated person, perhaps even an expert in some particular field of study, 1 Cor. 1:18-26.
4. Prejudicial, unsubstantiated criticisms of the Bible's primary character are easily countered by ample **evidence**.
5. Jesus Christ is an historical person!

### **Body:**

- I. **Many persons, highly educated or not, have an ungodly agenda to expunge belief in as many persons as possible that Jesus of Nazareth ever lived.**
  - A. Often, especially young people are completely unprepared to counter even the most general and unsubstantiated assertions that Jesus Christ never lived.
    1. Parents, elders, preachers and teachers must arm young people with the facts and the truth about the historicity of Jesus Christ before these young ones encounter these challenges to their Christian faith.
    2. For instance, stated or implied ridicule of college professors and the peer pressure of one's fellows threaten the convictions of Christian young people.
    3. After all, no one wants to appear ignorant and

- uneducated or antique in his belief system.
4. Further, if we do not prepare our young people for such encounters, they cannot meet these baseless accusations with any evidence.
  5. Consequently, we will lose these Christian young people!
- B. Don't doubt it; Bible critics loudly challenge that Jesus of Nazareth ever lived, thereby seeking to undercut the mainstay of the Christian religion.
1. These two quotations illustrate the critical claims against the historicity of Jesus Christ.

The world-famous medical doctor and lifelong critic of Christianity, Albert Schweitzer...wrote: The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb (1964, p. 398). (Butt)

...one court case in Viterbo, Italy is drawing worldwide attention. Atheist Luigi Cascioli is suing Catholic priest Enrico Righi for teaching that Jesus lived on Earth 2,000 years ago. Cascioli contends that Righi and the Catholic church have deceived many people by teaching that Jesus was a real historical person who actually lived in Palestine during the first century. (Lyons)

2. Of course, if one can undercut the Christian religion, he can remove Christianity's restrictive moral code from interfering with one's religious and moral recklessness.

## **II. In truth, ample evidence proves that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) really lived in the first century.**

- A. The Bible, an ancient document, proves that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) actually lived and died in the first century.

...there are 5,366 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in existence today, in whole or in part, that serve to corroborate the accuracy of the New Testament. ... In fact, the New Testament enjoys far more historical documentation than any other volume ever known. There are only 643 copies of Homer's *Iliad*, which is undeniably the most famous book of ancient Greece. No one doubts the text of Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, but we have only 10 copies of it, the earliest of which was made 1,000 years after it was written. To have such abundance of copies for the New Testament from within 70 years of their writing is nothing short of amazing... Livy wrote 142 books of Roman history, of which a mere 35 survive. The 35 known books are made manifest due to some 20 manuscripts, only one of which is as old as the fourth century. We have only two manuscripts of Tacitus' *Histories* and *Annals*, one from the ninth century and one from the eleventh. The *History of Thucydides*, another well-known ancient work, is dependent upon only eight manuscripts, the oldest of these being dated about A.D. 900 (along with a few papyrus scraps dated at the beginning of the Christian era). *The History of Herodotus* finds itself in a similar situation. (Butt)

1. The New Testament is more substantiated or validated as an historical record than numerous other histories for which much less evidence remains, yet are accepted as valid without doubt.
  2. The New Testament is an ancient document that testifies to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) in the first century.
- B. Historians verify that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real person who lived and died in first century Palestine.
1. Jewish history refers to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, known to many as the Christ, as actually living in the first century.

The earliest non-Christian testimony to the Lord's existence is that of the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-100). In *Antiquities of the Jews*, the

historian twice referred to Jesus. In one passage he called Jesus “the Christ,” referred to His “marvelous deeds,” and alluded to His death and resurrection (18.3.3). (Jackson)

2. In addition, though not acknowledging belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of Old Testament prophecy and belittling him, the Jewish Babylonian *Talmud* acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth lived in first century Palestine (Jackson).
3. Documents belonging to the era of the first century Roman Empire affirm that Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ, was an historical person.

Pliny, governor of Bithynia, wrote the Roman emperor Trajan (c. A.D. 112), asking for advice about how he should deal with Christians who made it a practice to meet on an appointed day to sing a hymn “to Christ as if to God” (*Epist.* X.96). The Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Annals* (c. A.D. 115), referred to “Christus,” who “was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius” (XV.44). Writing about A.D. 120, Suetonius, a popular Roman writer, declared that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they “were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (*Vita Claudii* XXV.4). “Chrestus” is a corrupted form of *Christos* (Christ). Luke alluded to this situation in Acts 18:2. (Jackson)

- C. The ancient enemies of Christianity did not deny the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, the one called the Christ.

Celsus, a pagan philosopher of the second century A.D., produced the oldest extant literary attack against Christianity. His *True Discourse* (c. A.D. 178) was a bitter assault upon Christ. Celsus argued that Jesus was born in low circumstances, being the illegitimate son of a soldier named Panthera.... As he grew, He announced Himself to be God, deceiving many. Celsus charged that Christ’s own people killed Him, and that His resurrection was a deception. But Celsus never questioned the historicity of Jesus. Lucian of Samosata (c. A.D. 115-200) was called “the Voltaire of Grecian

literature.” ...He said Christians worshipped the well-known “sophist” Who was crucified in Palestine because He introduced new mysteries. He never denied the existence of Jesus. Porphyry of Tyre was born about A.D. 233, studied philosophy in Greece, and lived in Sicily where he wrote fifteen books against the Christian faith. In one of his books, “Life of Pythagoras,” he contended that magicians of the pagan world exhibited greater powers than Christ. His argument was an inadvertent concession of Jesus’ existence, and power. (Jackson)

- D. Hence, biblical and non-biblical evidence actually agree respecting the historicity of Jesus Christ.
1. The Bible, especially the historical or biographical sections of the New Testament, affirm that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real, first century person.
  2. Ancient, non-biblical literature, though openly antagonistic respecting the divine nature of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ), nevertheless likewise affirms that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real, first century person.
  3. Anyone, with or without degrees of higher learning, who claims that Jesus Christ was not an historical, first century person is either ignorant of the facts or is purposely deceptive.
  4. **The historicity of Jesus Christ is an undeniable fact!**

### **Conclusion:**

1. There may appear to be only a small amount of evidence to establish the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) in non-biblical, ancient literature.
  - a. However, there is, for instance, as much or more evidence establishing the historicity of Jesus Christ as there is for the historicity of Governor Pilate who condemned our Lord to crucifixion.
  - b. Considering both non-biblical and biblical evidence respecting the historicity of Jesus Christ, there is more evidence that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) was a real, first century person than there is evidence for any other ancient event or person.

- c. "...the historicity of Jesus exceeds that of any other subject of history" (Spangler 282).
  - d. Rather than lacking evidence for the historicity of Jesus Christ, there is overwhelming evidence for the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ), especially contrasted with the amount of evidence for any other ancient person, place or event.
2. The best witnesses to the historicity of Jesus Christ are the reluctant, hostile witnesses who have absolutely nothing to gain (and everything to lose) by acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) lived in first century Palestine.
    - a. Rod Rutherford wrote: "The fact that this testimony comes from hostile witnesses gives even greater credibility to it, for these enemies of Christianity would have denied the historicity of Christ if they could have" (296).
    - b. Often, modern enemies of our Lord lack the integrity to inspect the historical record before making the baseless claim that history is silent about the existence of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ).
    - c. Still other critics we suspect, knowing better, dishonestly affirm what they know to be a lie when they claim the historical record is silent about the existence of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ).

**Invitation:**

1. Both non-biblical and biblical evidence confirm that Jesus Christ lived in first century Palestine, performed miracles and began the Christian religion.
2. Today, one becomes a follower of Christ and is inducted into the Christian religion the same way people became Christians and were added to Christ's church 2,000 years ago, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47.
3. Likewise, the sins of erring Christians today are forgiven in the same manner as the sins of Christians were forgiven 2,000 years ago, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

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# New Beginnings

## 2 Corinthians 5:17

**Thesis:** To encourage especially members of the Lord's church to purposely commit themselves to the work of self-improvement religiously or spiritually throughout the new year.

**Song:** *A New Creature*

### **Introduction:**

1. Contemporary people view the turning of the calendar from one year to the next as a time of new beginnings.
  - a. We call these *new beginnings* at the start of a new calendar year *resolutions*.
  - b. Typically, our *new beginnings* or *resolutions* are **positive** respecting self-improvement, e.g. "I'm going to start a new diet and exercise program—and stick with it this year."
  - c. Or, our *new beginnings* or *resolutions* may be **negative**, also respecting self-improvement, e.g. "I'm not going to spend my money impulsively this year as though money would burn a hole in my pocket."
2. The concept of beginnings is an important concept in the Bible as well.
  - a. For instance, the opening verses of the Bible record the "beginning" of the created, physical universe, Gen. 1:1.
  - b. Further, the Book of Genesis is really a book of beginnings in addition to creation, e.g. marriage and family.
  - c. John 1:1-2 uses the word "beginning" to represent the eternal habitation of the Godhead before there was any such thing as time.
  - d. First John 1:1 uses the word "beginning" to refer to the start of our Lord's earthly ministry.
3. Beginnings, especially new beginnings, are important to us today.
  - a. The word "beginning" means "the point at which something begins" (*Merriam Webster's*).
  - b. Hence, *beginning* "is used also to express the inauguration of a particular event (Ex 12:2)" (*ISBE*).
  - c. The beginning of a new year when everyone is already thinking about new year resolutions is a perfect time to devote oneself

to new beginnings religiously or spiritually—not just for a few days of the first month of the new year, but throughout the entire year.

**Body:**

**I. We all need some positive *resolutions* or *new beginnings*.**

- A. We need to resolve for the new year that we will **worship** Almighty God in his own appointed way when Christians assemble for worship every opportunity we possibly can.
  - 1. We already know well that we are obligated to assemble with fellow Christians each Lord’s Day, Heb. 10:25.
  - 2. We already know well that New Testament worship on the Lord’s Day includes giving back to the Lord some of our material blessings, 1 Cor. 16:1-2.
  - 3. Lord’s Day worship includes preaching and the Lord’s Supper, Acts 20:7.
  - 4. Worship assemblies also include singing and prayer, 1 Cor. 14:15.
  - 5. What could be a better way to start the new year than determining that when God’s people meet that we will be there to worship God in spirit and in truth, John 4:24?
- B. We need to resolve for the new year that we will study God’s Holy Word more effectively so that we can know and apply more of it to ourselves.
  - 1. We already know that we are supposed to arm ourselves with the Word of God through regular study, 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11.
  - 2. Armed with the Word of God, we can more easily defend ourselves against the efforts of the devil to destroy our hopes of going to heaven, Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Matt. 4:4, 6-7, 10.
  - 3. Only by arming ourselves with the Word of God through earnest Bible study can we adequately discern between right and wrong, Heb. 5:14; 1 Peter 2:2.
  - 4. If we do not study our Bibles diligently and attain some mastery of its contents, how can we instruct others or answer inquiries of others concerning the Word of God, 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:2?
  - 5. What could be a better way to start the new year than

- purposing to know God's Word better than we have in the past?
- C. We need to resolve for the new year that we will grow in Christian service to a height of service exceeding prior years.
1. Christians are supposed to be looking for opportunities for Christian service, Titus 2:14; 3:1; 1 Tim. 6:18; 2 Tim. 3:17.
  2. Rather than falling into the mold of the world, each of us need to live sacrificial lives consciously in the service of and in accordance with the will of God, Rom. 12:1-2.
  3. We must not simply be good people (though we must be good people), we must also do good, Heb. 13:15-16.
  4. Our lives will never be what they could be for God if we do not offer up "spiritual sacrifices," 1 Pet. 2:5.
  5. What could be a better way to start the new year than by growing spiritually as a servant of Jesus Christ?
- D. We need to resolve for the new year that we will more carefully practice Christian living than we have in the past.
1. Christians must abstain from every category or type of evil, 1 Thess. 5:22 ASV, NKJV.
  2. As Christians, we must not only refrain from allowing sinful practices a place in our lives, but we need to be militant against sinful activities, Eph. 5:11.
  3. One way we can better make sure that we do not allow sinful activities a place in our lives is to not socialize with ungodly people, Eph. 5:6-7; 1 Tim. 5:22; Rom. 12:10; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17.
  4. We can more easily be what God wants us to be if we think holy things and purposefully attempt to own the Christian virtues for ourselves, Phil. 4:8; 2 Pet. 1:4-11.
  5. What could be a better way to start the new year than by practicing godly living better than we have in the past, Titus 2:12?
- E. The best beginning anyone can make, or the best resolution anyone can make, in the new year is either to become a child of God or if already a child of God, but an erring child of God, is to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
1. Why not become "a new creature" in Jesus Christ to start this new year, 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27; Mark

16:16?

2. Erring Christians, there is no better time than the beginning of a new year to turn a new leaf of repentance, Acts 8:22.
3. Becoming a child of God or determining to be a faithful child of God will bring a fresh, brighter outlook to the new year.
4. Who will be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, or who will acknowledge waywardness (sin) in their lives and seek God's forgiveness?
5. What could be a better way to start the new year than by being a faithful child of God, a Christian father or a Christian mother or a Christian youngster?

## II. We all need some negative resolutions or new beginnings.

- A. We need to resolve for the new year to rid ourselves of some bad habits.
  1. Some bad habits make it difficult to impossible to favorably influence people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, e.g. using tobacco, procrastination, poor work ethic, etc.
  2. Some bad habits are definitely sinful, e.g. so-called social drinking, Gal. 5:21.
  3. "Drunkenness" means "intoxication" (*Biblesoft's; Merriam Webster*), which occurs with the first drink of alcohol.
  4. The souls of otherwise good people are marred by bad habits, some of which are definitely sinful.
  5. What could be a better way to start the new year than to lose those bad habits?
- B. We need to resolve for the new year to rid ourselves of some pet sins.
  1. First, we need to realize that any sin, no matter how trivial we make think it is, can cause a soul to be lost forever in a devil's hell, Rev. 21:8; Rom. 6:23.
  2. We might rationalize that our pet sin is a *victimless crime*, but even if not one other soul is affected by our pet sin, we nevertheless are the victim of a sin that can cause us to be lost, e.g. pornography, gambling, etc., Matt. 5:28; 2 Sam. 11:2; Prov. 6:25; Jam. 1:14-15; 2 Pet. 2:14; Eph. 4:28.

3. What could be a better way to start the new year than to stop fooling ourselves and wake up to the fact that every sin unrepented of is enough sin to condemn our souls to a devil's hell?

**Conclusion:**

1. Is your life going to be one of new beginnings or resolutions kept this year?
2. Are you going to be a better Christian, a better husband, a better wife, a better young person?
3. If you are not a Christian, are you going to become a Christian this year?

**Invitation:**

1. Why not become a Christian now and start the new year off right!
2. Jesus summarized the redemptive plan in what we call the Great Commission, Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:18-20.
3. The apostles Peter and John summarized what we might call the second law of pardon for erring Christians, Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.

**Works Cited**

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