

**Articles and Sermons :: God's Grace Overcomes Sin by Leland M. Haines**

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### The Sin Problem

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells the story of man's creation and fall. There we find that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Being created in the likeness and the image of God gave them a distinctive nature and place in creation (vv. 26-28; 5:1; 9:6; I Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). Being created in God's image and likeness means that man had a spiritual nature and was righteous and holy (Eph. 4:24). He lived in a perfect environment, free from even the knowledge of evil.

Man was not created as a puppet but was given an intellect with freedom of will. He was free to choose to obey his Maker or not. To make man's freewill meaningful, God gave him the power of choice in the Garden of Eden. There they could live by simple faith in God's word not to eat of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17). But an angel fallen because of pride, satan, challenged the women to rethink God's command. Doing so, and seeing "the tree was good for food" (3:6), and pleasant looking, promising to make her wise, "she took of the fruit . . . and did eat." Giving the same fruit to her husband, he too ate. Thus through doubting God's word, man chose to disobey Him (Gen. 2-3).

Disobedience to God's word resulted in the fall of man. He thus became a sinner and received a depraved nature (Rom. 5:12, 19; I Cor. 15:21-22; I Tim. 6:5). One immediate consequence of the Fall was man's separation from God (Pss. 5:4; 11:5; Isa. 59:2; Hab. 1:13). By nature God is holy (the most often mentioned attribute of God; see Exod. 15:11; Lev. 19:2; Pss. 99:9; 145:21; Isa. 6:3; I Pet. 1:16; Rev. 4:8; 6:10; 15:4; et al.); therefore He cannot tolerate sin. Thus sin brought about a breach between holy God and sinful, fallen man.

### The Love of God

Because God is also a God of love, He provided a way of redemption. God chose Abraham and his descendants to prepare man for the coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ. In the beginning of his gospel, John writes that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us . . . , full of grace and truth. . . . And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:14-17). God first showed man his need for salvation through the Mosaic Law. Although they were the Chosen People, the Jews learned throughout their history that the best they could do was to teeter-totter between good and evil. They needed something more than laws to make them good; they needed a new nature. God sent His Son as the perfect Man when the "fulness of the time was come" to redeem fallen man (Gal. 4:4). When Jesus was about thirty, He began His ministry. His mission was to establish a new way for God to deal with man. He was to become "the mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 12:24; 8:8, 13; Luke 16:16; Rom. 10:4) of "grace and truth" (John 1:17; cf. I Pet. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:1).

Let us now look at Jesus' teachings in more detail. After focusing on them, we will show that the Apostles taught the same things in the Epistles.

### Jesus Preached Repentance

At the start of His ministry, Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17) and "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Later He stated, in answering the Pharisees, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31; 32; cf. Matt. 9:12; 13; Mark 2:17). When Jesus was asked whether the Galilaeans who suffered at the hand of Pilate "were sinners above all men," He said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

In response to the Pharisees' accusing Jesus of eating with sinners, He said there would be more "joy . . . in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). He told them that "the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt. 12:41; cf. Luke 11:32). Jesus warned the cities where He did many "mighty works," saying, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty w

works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21; cf. Luke 10:13-14). Jesus then told a parable about a man's son who, when asked whether he would work, said, "I will not: but afterward he repented, and went" (Matt. 21:29). A changed mind is the outcome of repenting. These Scriptures show that sinners who do not follow God's will can find help. They need to repent; that is, they must turn away from their sin and to God, and find there grace to enable them to follow His will (Titus 2:11, 12).

John the Baptist told the multitudes to "bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8; cf. Matt. 3:8). Fruit is a figurative term that refers to good works, that is, obeying God's will. Just as fruit product of a fruit tree, good works are the natural outcome of repentance. John told his hearers, "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (v. 9). Lack of fruit can have serious consequences.

In a parable Jesus spoke of two sons being asked to work in a vineyard. One son responded, "I will not: but afterward he repented and went" (Matt. 21:29). The other son said he would go, but didn't. What counted was not the promise to work but actually doing the work. The same is true of repentance. What counts in real repentance is a change of mind with a change of direction.

### Jesus Preached the Kingdom of God

Early in His ministry, passing through Samaria, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15; see also Matt. 4:23-25). Jesus immediately drew popular support. The people "were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22; cf. 7:29).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus explained what was required of man. Central to His message was His preaching about the kingdom of God. The kingdom was not new to the Jewish people, for they knew God desired to rule over His people. However, they thought in terms of a political sovereignty. But the kingdom required much; it required God's sovereign rule among His people. Today the kingdom is a spiritual one, where God rules in the hearts of those who by grace follow Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught about the meaning of the kingdom, early in His ministry. In the Lord's Prayer, found in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2). For the Christians, God's kingdom and doing His will are tied together.

Jesus never gave a definition of the kingdom but taught what it was like through parables. It is like sown seed that can be snatched away, choked out by weeds, or grow to maturity and produce a crop (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-30, 36-43; cf. Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15). The kingdom of God would coexist with evil and the evil one, the devil. The kingdom is also like a grain of mustard (Matt. 13:31, 32; cf. Mark 4:30-32), and like leaven, growing from something small to a great work throughout the world (Matt. 13:33; cf. Luke 13:20, 21). The kingdom is also like a treasure hidden in a field (Matt. 13:44) and like a fine pearl (v. 45), which is worth an all-out effort to learn about and obtain. This does not mean that entrance can be earned, but that the seeker should repent, believe, and follow Jesus unreservedly. The kingdom is like a fishing net containing both bad and good fish when caught, but in the end the bad are thrown out (vv. 47-50). Only at the end will the godly followers of Christ and the ungodly be separated. In summary, the kingdom of God will exist side-by-side with evil, but the "Potentate Lord, holy and true," in the end will have His way (Rev. 6:10 RSV; cf. I Tim. 6:15; Acts 4:24), and the children of the King will live in a glorious kingdom.

### Jesus Preached the New Birth

The spiritual kingdom, established by God's empowering grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, requires a radical change in men and women to be able to submit to their King and do His will.

This need to be "born again" puzzled Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He told Jesus, "We know thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Jesus told him "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter in to the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (vv. 4-6). Jesus emphasized to be "born of water and of the Spirit," because what is "born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6).

Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (vv. 7, 8; Gal. 4:29; I Pet. 1:23; Titus 3:5). There is a mystery involved in being "born again" as there is a mystery about the wind. Miraculously, the Holy Spirit operates on the soul, making a telling impact on a person's will, desires, and values, giving him a new direction to his life. The person turns from his natural inclination to rebel against God to an earnest desire to obey God. How this occurs and what blending there is of truth, intellect, and the Holy Spirit's operations is beyond human understanding. We know, however, that these work together to produce an effect clearly visible in an individual's life.

Later Jesus said that "it is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63; cf. II Cor. 3:6). The Holy Spirit and the Word bring about the birth of a new spiritual man in the believer.

The results of the new birth can be seen in the parable of the sower. The seeds "fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matt. 13:8). Jesus explained, "He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty" (Matt. 13:23). Those who hear the gospel and understand it will have a new birth that brings about a change that produces good fruit<sup>3/4</sup> the doing of God's will.

We remember Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). The new birth creates a complete change in a person's life. The Christian will be childlike because of his new birth, and will have a complete change in his willingness to learn. He will listen to the Word and accept its teachings without questioning them. The new birth will make him to become a "child of God" (cf. Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:17). They must forget about being great and become as little children to enter this kingdom.

#### Jesus Preached Faith

Besides speaking to Nicodemus about man's need to be born again, Jesus spoke about the need to believe<sup>3/4</sup> to have faith in who He was and the message He was to preach. Jesus spoke, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Later Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. . . . this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:35, 40).

When one of His friends died, Jesus restored him to life. During this event Jesus explained, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Jesus, unlike anyone before or after Him, is the source of life and of resurrection from the dead. Neither life nor resurrection exist apart from Him. Victory over death is possible only for those who believe in Him, and act on their belief.

Jesus said clearly that the results of hearing Him have eternal consequences:

If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak. John 12:47-50

#### Jesus Preached Discipleship

Throughout His ministry Jesus called men to follow Him and become His disciples. A disciple is a learner, pupil, follower, apprentice, adherent, etc. The four Gospels contain many teachings of Jesus that focus on discipleship.

When Christ said to Peter, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," there was action. "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Jesus then saw two brothers, James and John, mending nets and called them. "They immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:19-22; cf. Mark 1:16-20). Jesus told Philip, "Follow me" (John 1:43). The Greek verb for "follow" used here means becoming a lifelong follower of Christ. Jesus used the term frequently (see Matt. 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21, 28; Mark 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:11; 9:23, 59-62; 18:22; John 10:4, 27

; 12:26; 21:19, 22; I Pet. 2:21).

Matthew exemplifies the type of response Jesus sought. This tax collector was sitting at his place of business when Jesus said to him, "Follow me. And he arose, and followed him" (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:13-17). Matthew, one of the "publicans and sinners" (Matt. 9:11), repented, changed his life, and became a devoted disciple. According to Luke, Jesus said to him, "Follow me. And he left, and rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:27-28). The call to follow was marked by a willing response and immediate action. He left his secular work and committed his life to following Jesus.

Matthew wrote that after the Sermon on the Mount, great crowds followed Him. Finally to get away from them, He wanted to go to the other side of the Sea. As He was ready to leave, two came to Him saying they would follow Him (Matt. 8:18-22). Luke wrote that when Jesus was not welcome in a Samaritan village, they moved on towards Jerusalem. As they were traveling, Luke says three volunteered to follow (Luke 10:57-62). The two Matthew mentioned appear to be the first two Luke wrote about. Jesus' response to them indicates what is involved in discipleship. Those who want to accept His call should count the cost involved.

When the first person approached Jesus, he was quick to say, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Luke 9:57; Matthew 8:19). Luke identifies this person only as a man, whereas Matthew says he was a scribe. He would therefore be a learned person, and surely knew about Jesus' teachings. Matthew's introduction of the second person, "another of the disciples," suggests he was a disciple. Anyway this scribe/disciple's quick volunteering may have been an impulse response to him knowing about Jesus. Jesus' response was for him to consider the cost: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:57, 58; cf. Matt. 8:19, 20). Jesus was homeless, and this may have contributed to Him being a Man of sorrows. To follow Him could be costly, and men need to consider it before starting out.

The second man, identified by Matthew as being a disciple (Matt. 8:21), accepted Jesus' call to follow Him, but he wanted to do a seemingly reasonable thing first: "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59). Being a disciple he knew Jesus' teachings, yet he thought he could do this first and follow later. Jesus responded, "Let the dead bury their own; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (v. 60). There was something more important to do. Jesus called this disciple to service of preaching. Since Matthew fixed his story just before the seventy was sent out and return from preaching (Matt. 10), suggests the call to preach was on in both of their minds. This service to God and fellow men had to be carried out without delay.

Luke wrote about a third person, who had a similar request for a delay: "Lord, I will follow thee: but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house" (v. 61). This would-be disciple was soon told that nothing may come between him and his following the Lord. There can be no delay. As Jesus noted, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). Again we see one ready to follow, yet not ready. His delay may seem reasonable, yet it involved risk of family influencing him otherwise (cf. Matt. 10:37). Discipleship can be a hard way. One must count the cost and not look back after taking up the cross.

When Jesus sent out His twelve apostles to preach "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7), and to do the works He was doing, He gave instructions concerning discipleship. The disciples would be "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (v. 16), and should expect opposition and persecution. This illustrates the general rule that "the disciple is not above his master" (v. 24). In this case, the disciples could expect the same treatment as their Master was receiving.

Jesus then told them, "Think not that I come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). There would be conflict in building the kingdom, and the expected peace would not come immediately (cf. Isa. 9:2-6). "On earth," refers to men in general. The lack of peace results from not all men responding to Jesus' call to follow Him. The opposition may occur even in their own household (Matt. 10:35, 36). Jesus next states two principles: "He that loveth . . . more than me is not worthy of me" (v. 37), "and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (v. 38).

In one sense the cross was Jesus' special mission in life. Disciples, in this sense, need not expect to take the literal cross Jesus took, and be literally crucified. Yet the disciples can expect opposition, and even death. We are to devote ourselves to following God's mission for our lives, and this entails the outworking of the Great Commission and all that includes it. If one seeks to avoid this, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

Later after telling His disciples that He must suffer and be killed in Jerusalem, Jesus told them similarly, "If any man will

come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24, 25; cf. Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27; 14:27; 17:33). Deny himself means to disown one's personal desires and yield oneself completely to following the Lord, even if it means taking up one's own cross. If one tries to avoid his cross and thus save his life, he will lose his life in the end. To be willing to lose his life for the Lord's sake, one will find it. Thus taking up one's cross and following Christ is an all important and necessary part of redemption.

In another instance, when great multitudes accompanied Jesus, He turned to them and spoke a similar message. There is a need to "hate" family members and one's own life: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26; cf. 12:51-53). These seem like hard words, but it is true that His disciples must lay aside interests that prevent full surrender and total loyalty to Christ. This "hate" can be understood by comparing it to the love Jesus demanded. He told His disciples, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:36, 37). Disciples must love Jesus above all others. Faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus Christ must transcend all family relationships and one's own desires.

Nothing is to stand in the way of following Christ. Jesus said, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). He then mentioned that a person intending to build a tower will first estimate its cost to be sure he can finish it, and that no king would go to war without first considering if he could win. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (v. 33). Discipleship and salvation are serious matters and require a full commitment at the start and putting everything else in second place throughout life. Jesus Christ must be first place in the disciple's life.

Those who follow will change their walk and be free of sin. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Some Jews, upon hearing this, questioned Him. Jesus told them, "Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). These believers told Jesus they were Abraham's children and not in bondage, and asked Him, "How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (v. 33). Jesus told them, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (v. 34). The disciple is not to be a slave of sin, but a son of God who loves to do his Father's will. This freedom to obey is true freedom.

Jesus noted that the example of sheep could help us to understand discipleship. When the "porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . . The sheep follow him. . . . A stranger will they not follow" (John 10:3-5). Later Jesus explained, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (vv. 27, 28).

In John 15, Jesus explains how fruit bearing relates to discipleship. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Then He explains, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. . . . If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (vv. 5, 8-10).

Lest some think discipleship is a burden, Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). How can discipleship be easy? The answer lies in the rebirth experience. The disciple's inner nature is changed so that he desires to do God's will; thereby he is not burdened but finds righteousness, peace, and joy (John 14:27; 16:33; Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22, et al.). The inner change removes the burden, even though the disciple may suffer for the cause of Christ (Matt. 10:16-25; Luke 10:3; 21:5-19; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29, 30; 3:10; II Tim. 2:12; I Pet. 4:12-14; 5:10).

Discipleship is a narrow and hard way that is quite different from what many picture Christianity to be. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14; cf. Luke 13:23-24). Discipleship is not a burden or a wide way, but it is the way that leads to eternal life.

Jesus Christ: The Only Way

Jesus taught that He was the only way to everlasting life. Jesus said it was God's will that "every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40; cf. 47). We can see Jesus because He is the Light (1:9; 3:19) that frees man from his sins so he no longer walks in the darkness but in the light. He also said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (8:12; cf. 9:5; 12:35, 36). In response to a question, Jesus told Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (14:5). These teachings leave no doubt that there is only one way.

Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed in Him: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). He explained that "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (v. 34). The person who is a "servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (vv. 35, 36). To be free means freedom from the power and the eternal consequences of sin that enslaves men. Jesus promised, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (v. 51). This is true freedom.

Those who seek eternal life must enter by the Door. Jesus used this metaphor to describe the purpose of His being; "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:1, 2). The sheepfold was a fenced enclosure with a door to enter; Jesus entered so others might have life. He then became the Door for others to enter. He said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. . . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . . . Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (vv. 9-11, 17; cf. 15). In the kingdom Jesus is the only door since He is the One who gave His life so repentant men can be saved.

When Lazarus, His close friend died, Jesus restored him to life. During this event Jesus told Martha, when she was concerned about her brother's death, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Since Jesus is the source of life and resurrection from the dead, neither life nor resurrection exist apart from Him. Victory over death is possible only for those who believe in Him.

Jesus spoke clearly that the results of hearing Him have eternal consequences. He said He came "to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47, 48).

Jesus' purpose was to save the sinner, but if the sinner rejected Him, there was no other way to have eternal life. The sinner will be judged by what he rejected 3/4 the word Jesus bore. Judgment will occur on the basis of God's authority. He empowered Jesus to forgive sins, as He bore witness early in His ministry (Mark 2:10; Luke 7:48).

Peter told the rulers and elders that Jesus Christ, whom they crucified and God raised, was the chief corner stone, and that "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). There is no other name, that is, no one else who could save them. If one wants to be saved from their sins they need to turn to Jesus Christ for help.

### His Mighty Works

The Gospels record many instances of Jesus performing mighty works. For example, Matthew mentioned ten specific healings and one instance of power over natural forces in chapters 8 and 9 of his gospel. Jesus healed the leper (Matt. 8:2-4), healed the centurion's paralyzed servant (vv. 5-13), healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (vv. 14, 15), healed many with demons (v. 16), calmed the storm (vv. 23-27), healed two demoniacs (vv. 28-34), healed a paralytic (9:1-8), healed the woman with a hemorrhage (v. 20), raised the ruler's daughter from the dead (vv. 18-26), healed two blind men (vv. 27-30), and healed the mute demoniac (vv. 32-34).

The above are but a few of the miracles recorded in the Gospels. The four Gospels specifically mention in detail some thirty-five miracles and briefly mention many more. As John wrote, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). Some of these are contained in the other three Gospels, but most are not recorded. John wrote, "There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (21:25). When we consider that the four Gospels record only a small fraction of approximately sixty days of Jesus' three-year ministry (roughly 5 percent of the days), and that many, many books have been written on this ministry, it is evident that many more books could be written

about the rest of His life and ministry.

These works bore witness to Jesus and gave Him great fame (Matt. 9:8, 26, 31, 33), and resulted in many believing in Him (John 2:11, 23; 3:2; 6:2, 14; 7:31; 9:16, 31-33; 12:18; et al.). Although Jesus performed many miraculous works, these were not the heart of His ministry. In fact, He often tried to keep men from giving too much attention to them by asking those healed to refrain from telling others (Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:22-26, 30; 9:9). Often He included a spiritual lesson with the works so men would see beyond the miraculous. Jesus' main ministry was spiritual. He performed miracles to support this ministry, not to hinder it. Finding solutions to physical problems must not interfere with solving man's root problem, that is, his spiritual one.

## The Twelve

Jesus' ministry was not confined to His own labors. He appointed twelve disciples or apostles to represent Him in His ministry. When Jesus sent the twelve out midway in His ministry, He told them to call for repentance: "And they went out, and preached that men should repent" (Mark 6:12). Towards the end of His earthy ministry, Jesus told His disciples, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:46-47).

Jesus did not write any books about His teachings but made it possible for His Apostles to record His word. He promised them that the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). He "will guide into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13; cf. vv. 14, 15; 14:16, 17; 15:26, 27; 17:7, 8, 17, 20; Acts 1:8). In a prayer, Jesus said, "they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:7, 8). The reality of having received the word and the promise enabled the disciples to recall and teach all the things Jesus had taught them, and to make a written record of His words and works. This enables us to know His teachings and the plan of salvation.

## II. Jesus Brought Redemption

## III. Jesus Explains Through the Apostles

## IV. God's Will for the Christian, and His Word

### God's Will for the Christian

We have seen that God desires the Christian to be obedient. The question that must be asked is, To what is the Christian obedient? How does he know what God wants him to do?

First and foremost the answer is found in the reply Jesus gave to a lawyer, who asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40; cf. Luke 10:27, 28; Mark 12:30, 31; cf. Deut. 6:5; 10:12, 13; Lev. 19:18).

Love towards God finds its expression in keeping God's commandments brought by His Son. Jesus told His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The apostle John wrote, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:2, 3). Love is the foremost commandment Christians are to keep, but it is not the only one. Christians are to keep all the commandments given by Jesus Christ and His apostles for the Church's Age.

The commandments of God for the most part are expressions of love. The apostles recognized that to love was to fulfill the law.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. 13:8-10; cf. Gal. 5:14; Col. 3:14; Jas. 2:8

#### The Bible

Second, one must realize that God's law or commandments do not originate within oneself, that is, one does not decide what he thinks is right and then do it. The source of right and wrong is from an outside authority, the Word of God, the Bible. Christians receive knowledge and power through the written Word to live a life of discipleship.

The Bible reveals God's will because it is inspired by Him. Paul emphasized this truth when he wrote, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Scripture is the source of doctrine and is to be used for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The Christian should be willing to literally follow the Word's teachings, from such major issues as loving one's enemies (Matt. 5:38-45, Luke 6:35), to not wearing gold, and women wearing modest, inexpensive dresses (I Tim. 2:9; I Pet. 3:3), etc. Scriptural teachings are not to be ignored; they are given for our benefit and compliance. Regardless what personal opinions are, we should follow all the commandments. By following them, we will understand them, and learn to appreciate them.

Another point to remember is that there are two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world (satan). The message of the kingdom of God was central to Jesus' teaching and preaching. His very first message was, "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Those who are part of this kingdom possess new values, of which the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is an example. These standards are markedly different from the standards of the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of the world is composed of the children of Satan (Matt. 13:38; John 8:44; cf. 16:11) and is ruled by Satan (Eph. 2:2). The Christian is called to come "out of the world" (John 17:6; cf. 18:36; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2) and not be a part of it (15:19; 17:12-14, 16; Mark 4:19; 8:36; 13:22).

The basic concept of the two kingdoms is also expressed in the Epistles. Paul introduced the third section of Romans (chapters 12-16) by giving practical instructions concerning the Christian life. He wrote, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (12:2). The Christian is not to receive his code of conduct or system of values from the world. Since his mind has been transformed by being renewed, he no longer views things as the world does. His renewed mind makes it inconsistent for Him to look to the world for guidelines. Only by turning from the world and being transformed by the renewed mind can he prove what is the will of God.

Peter similarly said, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourself according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:14-16; cf. 2:5, 9; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:22; 3:1). "Be not conformed" expresses negatively the idea of holiness. The Christian's goal is to be holy because God is holy.

The apostle John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John 2:15-17). Again, a contrast is made between the world and God. The Christian is to turn his back to the lusts and pride of the world, since they are not of God. Rather, he is to turn to God, loving Him and doing His will. This turning is important because it carries the promise that those who do the will of God will abide forever. Christians often face situations where no direct word speaks to an issue. This does not mean Christians have nothing to guide them, because they always have the principle of love, i.e., love not the world, etc.

Christians will know God's will because they "walk in the Spirit, and . . . shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). The Spirit contends with the flesh and motivates Christians not to do the works of the flesh. Paul wrote that "the works of the flesh are . . . adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (vv. 19-21). Christians have no p



part in these activities. Christians have the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, which "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (vv. 22, 23). Paul concludes, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (v. 25). Godly brethren abstain from the works of the flesh and walk by the Spirit.

Christians also must remember that church leaders and other brethren can help them to understand scriptural principles and therefore know what is right for everyday situations. Both the brotherhood and the elders can share their thoughts and experiences on these situations.

#### Summary

Christians should follow God's will naturally and out of love. Those who believe in Jesus and understand the love He has for them will love Him. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He promised He would send them a Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to guide and teach them. Jesus explained,

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. vv. 21-24

Jesus expects those who love Him to keep His Word. Those who believe in Him and keep His word will bear fruit. "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:1, 11). The fruit of obedience springs from the believer's life in Christ and brings glory to God and joy to Christ and to the believer.

#### V. Come and Follow

The redemption brought by Jesus Christ is available to all who will believe, repent, obey, and follow Him as disciples. These are all important and necessary for eternal life. No person should think that faith alone will suffice. Faith alone will not nullify Jesus' teachings on repentance, the new birth, and discipleship.

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and I will ease you; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). This promise still stands today. Searchers will find that repentance, the new birth, and discipleship are all made possible because of God's grace. All should remember too that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Many fail to "enter . . . in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because straight is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14, cf. Luke 13:23-24). God is ready to justify (to declare the sinner righteous before God) all who will come to Jesus by His grace.

#### Read the Bible

This booklet has attempted to show how God's grace has made redemption possible through His Son Jesus Christ. The reader is encouraged to turn to the Bible and search its passages to understand its message on redemption and God's will for your life.

The reader may wish to start a Bible study program by reading first the Gospels, especially Matthew and John. We should constantly read and study the Bible. To learn about God and His plan for us, we need to read, read, and read the Scriptures. Only then can we see for ourselves what Scripture teaches.

One who studies the Word sincerely and prayerfully in humility will find truth there. And we will find God's call to holy living.