

"...we were bold in our God to speak to you

THE GOSPEL OF GOD...

I Thess. 2:2

INTRODUCTION

The word "*gospel*" means God's good news. It is the good news concerning salvation through Jesus Christ. In order to understand and believe the Gospel you must first know about the wonderful God of the Bible, the Lord of Heaven and earth. There are many false ideas about God. People often invent a "god" of their own liking based upon their own imaginations. There are also many false gospels being proclaimed today. The only sure and unerring guide concerning God and the Gospel of God is the Holy Scripture. The Bible was given by God Himself for "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (2 Tim 3:16). Therefore the Bible is the only reliable source for a saving knowledge of God.

GOD IS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

The Bible opens with the words, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Gen 1:1). Indeed, "*all things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*" (Jn 1:3). "*In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is*" (Ex. 20:11). The universe in which you live did not just come about by chance or random events. The theory of evolution is not compatible with the record of Scripture. Its purpose is to eliminate the need for God. However, Almighty God spoke the universe into existence - the vast solar system containing the Sun, planets, stars, the animals from the tiny mite to the gigantic blue whale, the plants from the thin blade of green grass to the towering redwoods. There is a divine design and purpose behind everything which exists.

The crowning act of God's creation was man. "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*" (Gen 2:7). You must acknowledge, "*The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life*" (Job 33:4). God formed you in the womb and brought you into existence. He is the reason you are here.

Since God is your Creator, you belong to God and are accountable to Him. He is the One who sustains your life. He "*giveth to all life and breath and all things*" (Acts 17:25). "*For in Him we live, and move, and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). You are absolutely dependent upon God. As a creature you are God's property. He is your Owner and Master. He has the right to decide what is right and wrong for you. He has the right to set the rules and regulations for your life. He has the right to determine your eternal destiny.

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING GOD

The nature of God cannot fully be understood. "*Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*" (Job 11:7). The answer is "no." The Bible, however, does reveal many things about God and you must believe all that is revealed. What is the God of the Bible like? An entire book could be written on this subject without even scratching the surface of the character of God!

GOD IS A SPIRIT

Jesus said, "*God is a Spirit*" (Jn 4:24). As a Spirit, God does not have a material or physical body. God does not literally have hands, eyes, ears, or a nose. When the Bible speaks of the hand, eye, ear, etc., of the Lord it is simply using a human expression as an aid to our understanding. As a Spirit, God is said to be "*invisible*" (Rom 1:20, I Tim 1:17). God forbids any image or likeness to be formed of His being (Deut 4:15-23) for "*no man hath seen God at any time*" (Jn 1:18). Since God is a Spirit "*they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (Jn 4:24).

GOD IS A TRIUNE BEING

There are not a multitude of gods. "*I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God*" (Isa 44:6). The Bible emphatically states, "*There is one God*" (I Tim 2:5). Yet this one God consists of three Persons, the Father, the Son or the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Holy Spirit. God is a triune being (one God who exists in three distinct Persons). This is known as the doctrine of the Trinity. All three Persons are God and equal in nature, power, eternity and glory, yet there are not three separate Gods. This one God cannot be divided in nature or being but the three Persons of the Godhead possess personal distinctions as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Son and the Holy Ghost are as truly and properly God as the Father. While this is difficult for the human mind to comprehend it is the stated truth of Scripture. This is why you find God the Creator saying, "*Let US make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Gen 1:26). There is a plurality of Persons in this one God. This is why it is said of Jesus, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God*" (Jn 1:1-2). This is why lying unto the Holy Ghost is said to be lying unto God (Acts 5:3-4). Baptism is to be administered "*in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*" (Matt 28:19). The fact that there is one "Name" indicates the equal authority of the Persons involved as well as the truth that there is but one God being spoken about. When the Apostle Paul pronounces God's blessing on the Corinthian believers he does so with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*" (II Cor 13:14). Anyone who does not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity does not believe in the God of the Bible!

GOD IS A PERSONAL BEING

God is not an impersonal force which cannot be known or loved. God is a personal Being with Whom you can enjoy fellowship. "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*" (Jn 17:3). God can and does speak through His Word. And He is a God who hears and answers prayer. It is through the Gospel that fellowship with God is made possible.

GOD IS ETERNAL

"*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God*" (Psa 90:2). While God created all things there never was a time when God did not exist. And He shall forevermore reign as the "*King eternal*" (I Tim 1:17) for He is "*the eternal God*" (Deut 33:27).

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

"Wither shall I go from thy Spirit? wither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psa 139:7-10). Since God is a Spirit and does not have physical dimensions He is everywhere at once! You cannot escape from His presence no matter where you may go. "Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" (Jer 23:24).

GOD IS ALL-KNOWING

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). Nothing can be hidden or kept secret from God. Whatever you do in thought, word or deed He has full knowledge of it (I Sam 16:7, Prov 15:3). God knows what will take place before it even happens, thus He is never caught off guard or unawares by anything which occurs. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done..." (Isa 46:10) is something an omniscient God can easily do.

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

"God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God" (Psa 62:11). God is all-powerful. "With God nothing shall be impossible" (Lk 1:37). God's power is so great that it is beyond human comprehension. The created universe testifies to this, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their hosts have I commanded (Isa 45:12). "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand" (Psa 89:13). God can confidently declare "Is there anything too hard for Me?" (Jer 32:27).

GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE

"For I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal 3:6). Whatever the excellencies, attributes or determinations of God they will remain perpetually the same. God is compared to a "rock" (Deut 32:4) because with Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17). God is unaffected by anything which takes place in His universe. All that He was prior to creation He will be at the consummation of the world and forever will remain.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

"But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatever He hath pleased." (Psa 115:3). The Bible portrays God as a mighty King who sits upon a throne ruling the universe. There is nothing which happens outside of His control for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). All the created universe, including angels, men and animals, is under His complete control. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" [Dan 4:35]. No one can thwart His will. No one can stop Him from doing exactly as He pleases.

GOD IS HOLY AND JUST

"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:3). This attribute of God transcends all the rest. He is frequently called "The Holy One". The Lord is "glorious in holiness" (Ex 15:11). God alone is pure and righteous in all that He is and in all that He does (Psa 145:17, Rev 15:4). "God is light,

and in Him is no darkness at all" (I Jn 1:5). There is not the slightest moral imperfection to be found in God. This infinitely holy God demands that you meet His standard of moral perfection - "Be holy; for I am holy" (I Pet 1:16). God demands that you conform to His perfect holiness in your thoughts, words and deeds. Those without holiness shall never be able to enter into His presence (Heb 12:14). God is not some indulgent father figure who treats affronts to His holiness with leniency and tolerance. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa 7:11). This is why "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). Because God is holy He is always just. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne" (Psa 89:14). All must acknowledge about God, "just and true are Thy ways" (Rev 15:3). God's holiness and justice demand that He punish all wrongdoing. God both rewards and punishes in this present life (Psa 58:11) as well as in eternity (Matt 25:46). There will be a day when everyone will give an account to God of his or her life. All wrongs will be faithfully addressed by the holy and just Judge of all the earth. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor 5:10).

GOD IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS

"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex 34:6-7). While God is inflexibly just and holy, He is also compassionate and merciful. Indeed, God graciously forgives sin and shows love to the most unworthy individuals. Yet God's mercy and grace are never in conflict with His justice and holiness. For even though God forgives transgressions His holiness and justice are not bent or compromised in doing so for He is still a God "that will by no means clear the guilty." "God is love" (I Jn 4:8), thus "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity," but also "God is light" (I Jn 1:5), opposing and judging all the works of darkness or evil. God loves "sinners" (Rom 5:8) and yet "the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth" (Psa 11:5). How can this be? How can God be both perfectly holy and just and still be merciful and gracious? The answer to this is found in the message of the "Gospel of God" (I Thess 2:2).

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING MAN

WHAT IS WRONG WITH MAN?

Daily in the newspapers and on T.V. you hear of dreadful things taking place like crime, murder, rape, assault, burglary, child abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and so forth. The Bible says, *"the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live" (Ecc 9:3). If God created everything "very good" (Gen 1:31) how is it that man constantly does such evil things? The answer is that man is in a fallen state. "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc 7:29).*

As mentioned earlier, God is the Creator of all things, including man. When God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, He made them *"in His own image" (Gen 1:27). None of the multitude of animals created are said to be made "in the image of God," only man. This makes you completely different from a dog, horse or an ape. Now since God is a Spirit, the "image" being spoken about is not physical in nature. You do not possess the shape or appearance of the true and living God. The Lord gave man spiritual qualities such as "righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24) and "knowledge" (Col*

3:10). Man was made to reflect in some manner God's holy character or moral image.

God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment called the Garden of Eden. At this point, being morally upright, they lived in perfect harmony with the Lord and each other. It was their responsibility to "dress" and "keep" Eden (Gen 2:15). In addition, they were given some general instructions: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen 1:28). While Adam and Eve had tremendous freedom, God gave them a specific prohibition. They could eat from any tree in the garden except the one in the middle of the garden called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God solemnly warned, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). This was a righteous law which provided a test regarding Adam and Eve's obedience to the Lord. Would they do as God said simply because God commanded it?

One day Satan "beguiled Eve" (II Cor 11:3) regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil by questioning the character of God and by getting her to doubt that God had her best interests in mind. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen 3:6). Adam and Eve willfully transgressed the law God had given them and at that moment "sin entered into the world" (Rom 5:12). Their wonderful relationship with God was severed and they were now "afraid" of their Creator (Gen 3:10). "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8). They were frightened, ashamed, and felt the tremendous guilt that accompanies sin.

God's penalty for this violation was death. There was a spiritual aspect to this death as well as a physical one. Spiritual death occurred immediately, for Adam and Eve lost their fellowship with God. Spiritual death is separation from God. This is why those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) are said to be "without God in the world" (Eph 2:12) and "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18). At the same time, Adam and Eve began to die physically. Eventually physical death overtook them both. Thus God's promised judgment took place as He said it would.

The sad outcome of this sin is that all the offspring of Adam and Eve inherited their fallen nature. Adam acted as the representative for all mankind. Everyone born inherits the spiritual deadness and mortality of Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19). All mankind now possesses a sinful nature (i.e. is spiritually dead) and will eventually die physically as a result of Adam's transgression. This is why the world is in such a troublesome mess.

YOU ARE A SINNER

Since you are a descendant of Adam you have inherited a sinful nature and you will die. Your corrupted nature constantly expresses itself in acts of sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (I Jn 1:8). You may not like to admit this but your "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). Does not your conscience often condemn you

when you do something wrong? Any honest evaluation will lead you to the conclusion, *"Behold, I am vile!"* (Job 40:4). You might excuse yourself by thinking that you are not such a bad person. You may live better than most people around you. You are not a bank robber, child molester, or murderer. You may even be religious and attend a church on a regular basis. But listen to what the Bible says, *"For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not"* (Ecc 7:20).

The Apostle Paul once thought of himself as a very good person (Phil 3:4-6) but the perfect standard of God's Law exposed his sinfulness. *"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet...For I was alive without the law once; But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died"* (Rom 7:7,9). An understanding of the Law of God will cause you to react just like Paul did. God's Law is expressed concisely in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:3-17):

1. *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*
2. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*
3. *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*
5. *Honor thy father and thy mother*
6. *Thou shalt not kill*
7. *Thou shalt not commit adultery*
8. *Thou shalt not steal*
9. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor*
10. *Thou shalt not covet*

You might think that you have done a fairly good job of keeping these commandments. However, you must realize each *"commandment is exceeding broad"* (Psa 119:96). It is not the mere *"letter"* of the Law which God demands you obey but also the *"spirit"* of the Law. It was the 10th commandment about coveting which Paul found so condemning. Sinful inward thoughts violate the Law of God as well as the outward act. This is why when Jesus explained the true meaning of *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* he said, *"whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"* (Matt 5:28). And when he explained the spirit of *"Thou shalt not kill"* he said, *"whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment"* (Matt 5:22). Job was concerned about heart sin, *"It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts"* (Job 1:5). Zechariah the prophet was also: *"And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath"* (Zech 8:17). Does not God condemn those who cannot wait for the Sabbath to be over so they can get back to swindling people out of their money (Amos 8:4-5)? Does He not promise to bless those who *"delight"* in the Sabbath (Isa 58:13)? Does He not demand that *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"* (Mk 12:30)? Finally, the Bible teaches that one violation of the Law means you are guilty of breaking each and every one of the commandments! *"For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law"* (Jam 1:10-11). Have you not deliberately broken several of these commandments, if not in an outward act, then in your heart? Do you not, therefore, stand guilty before a holy God of breaking the whole Law? *"There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one"* (Rom 3:10-12).

YOU DESERVE DIVINE PUNISHMENT

There is a divine displeasure and indignation toward all sin, therefore God's anger burns against the sinner. *"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"* (Rom 1:18). A holy God must punish those who are guilty of breaking His law, for He *"will by no means clear the guilty"* (Ex 34:7). He isn't simply going to ignore your transgressions and forget about them, for *"God is angry with the wicked every day"* (Psa 7:11). And not only does the wrath of God *"abide"* upon sinners in this life, the Scriptures teach there is *"the wrath to come"* (I Thess 1:10). Unless God's righteous indignation can be turned away before you die, you will be *"punished with everlasting destruction"* (II Thess 1:9) in the *"lake of fire"* (Rev 20:14). In what is commonly called *"hell"*, you will experience the fierce wrath of God forever. Hell is described in the most frightening terms as a *"furnace of fire"* (Matt 13:50) and a *"place of torment"* (Lk 16:28), where there is *"no rest day nor night"* (Rev 14:11). The Bible teaches that *"every one of us shall give an account of himself to God"* (Rom 14:12). God is not unjust, therefore, no sinner can claim he wasn't treated fairly and doesn't deserve to suffer the awful consequences of his sin. A holy God demands perfection and you are guilty of countless transgressions. One sin will damn your soul and during your lifetime you have heaped up an entire mountain of them. God's promise of divine punishment will be fulfilled, *"the wicked shall be turned into hell"* (Psa 9:17). You need to ponder the question which Jesus once put to the religious leaders of His day, *"how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"* (Matt 23:33).

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST

THE PLAN OF SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST

Given the fact that every person ever born comes into this world with a fallen nature which delights in all sorts of sin, and everyone is under God's awful wrath, what hope is there? It would appear that a holy God could justly consign all human beings to everlasting punishment in hell. If there is any hope it must be found in the fact that God is also merciful and gracious. Before the creation of the universe, before mankind fell through Adam's sin, God, who can declare *"the end from the beginning"* (Isa 46:10), made a plan of salvation. The Bible speaks of God's *"purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began"* (II Tim 1:9). While the entire human race deserved to perish, God purposed to save some out of the whole of mankind. *"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation"* (II Thess 2:13). God has the sovereign right to choose to save whom He pleases for He declares, *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"* (Rom 9:15). The Son of God would come to earth and live a life of perfect obedience before God for these chosen ones. And then Christ would die in the place of these individuals and for their sins in order to *"give eternal life to as many as Thou [God the Father] hast given Him [God the Son]"* (Jn 17:2). God the Holy Spirit would apply the saving work of Christ to these same individuals and call them to salvation (Tit 3:5, Eph 4:4). If God, *"who is rich in mercy"* (Eph 2:4), had not purposed to intervene there would not be any hope for sinners.

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Now to carry out the plan of salvation, *"when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law"* (Gal 4:4-5). God the Son, Jesus Christ, *"made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men"* (Phil 2:7). The eternal *"Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"* (Jn 1:14). Yet while Jesus took upon Himself a human nature, the Bible states that *"in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col 1:9). He was fully God while being fully man. Two distinct natures (divine and human) were inseparably joined together in the one Person of Jesus Christ. He became the God-man. To this end, Jesus was conceived by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary without her sexually knowing a man, *"for with God nothing shall be impossible"* (Lk 1:34-37). While the God-man lived among human beings He was very different, for though He found Himself *"tempted like as we are" yet He "did no sin"* (Heb 4:15, I Pet 2:22). He alone could say *"for I do always those things that please"* the Father (Jn 8:29). He kept the law of God in every detail and could claim to be *"holy, harmless, undefiled, [and] separate from sinners"* (Heb 7:25). This is why it is said, *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"* (Rom 10:4).

THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

Christ's public ministry was amazing. The people seeing His miracles and hearing His teaching *"were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?"* (Matt 13:54). The multitudes *"were astonished at His doctrine: For He taught them as one having authority"* (Matt 7:29) and He went about *"healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people"* (Matt 4:23). He was even able to raise the dead! He indeed proved Himself to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. The theme of Christ's message was and still is, *"And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life"* (Jn 6:40) and *"If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins"* (Jn 8:24).

THE SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

From the very beginning of Christ's public ministry, John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the *"Lamb of God"* (Jn 1:29) indicating that He came to die as a sacrifice in the place of sinners. *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* (I Tim 1:15). A holy God has ordained two places where sin is fully dealt with and justly punished. One is the Lake of Fire where people suffer everlasting punishment for their own sins. The other is the Cross where the Son of God willingly suffered and died for the sins of others, *"the just for the unjust"* (I Pet 3:18). *"In due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"* (Rom 8:6-9). Christ's death guaranteed, for all those for whom He was a substitute, the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the punishment they deserved. This is the good news of the Gospel. There is a way in which hell-deserving sinners can find right standing with a holy God. Sinners may be *"justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 3:24). By Jesus dying in the place of sinners and taking away their sins, He turned away God's wrath and brought about reconciliation. Note that God retains His holiness and justice, for Christ bore the awful punishment due sinners. Yet God demonstrated His mercy and grace by sending Christ as a

substitute for sinners. Jesus came to *"save His people from their sins"* (Matt 1:21). Since Christ *"put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"* (Heb 9:26) and *"by His own blood...obtained eternal redemption"* (Heb 6:12), He did not die for everyone. He did not take away the sins of every person, for some will die in their sins and suffer the eternal wrath of God (Jn 8:24). *"For God hath not appointed us [believers] to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that...we should live together with him"* (I Thess 5:9-10). Those who believe in Christ are not appointed to wrath, but to salvation and eternal life. Those who do not believe are condemned to everlasting suffering being *"appointed ...to wrath."* *"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"* (Jn 3:36).

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Even though Jesus was crucified and died and was buried, three days later, He was *"declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead"* (Rom 1:4). The resurrection was not a secret event, but Christ *"showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs"* (Acts 1:3). He was bodily resurrected from the grave. At first His appearance frightened His disciples who thought they had seen a spirit. Jesus calmed them by saying, *"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself: handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have"* (Matt 28:6). In raising Him from the dead, God demonstrated that Jesus had fully delivered from the penalty of sin those for whom He died. God *"raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God"* (I Pet 1:21). In this manner you can be assured that God was fully *"satisfied"* (Isa 53:11) with Christ's substitutionary death.

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives into heaven to sit at God the Father's right hand. *"God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil 2:9-11). Christ now reigns as *"King of kings and Lord of lords"* (Rev 19:16) for God has *"put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things"* (Eph 2:22). He has been given *"dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him"* (Dan 7:14). Jesus is ruling and reigning now over all things. You will have to face Jesus Christ one day and answer for all that you have done in your life. *"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him"* (Psa 2:12).

While Jesus was on earth He carried out the office of a Priest by offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin. But now, having ascended into heaven, He is continually making intercession for believers (Heb 7:25). Because of Christ's prayers His people are kept from falling and are preserved so that they persevere in the faith and eventually enter into heaven. None of God's people can ultimately be condemned for Christ has died for them and presently intercedes for them (Rom 8:33-34). There is only *"one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (I Tim 2:5) for He is the last High Priest. No special saint or angel can gain you access to God for Jesus claims *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (Jn 14:6). This is why you are taught to pray in the name of Jesus (Jn 14:13).

Jesus also fulfills the office of Prophet (Acts 3:19-26, Heb 1:1-2). As a Prophet, Christ reveals to sinners the Father so that they may know Him. *"Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him"* (Matt 11:27). Christ also teaches believers so that they are led into all truth and walk in fellowship with their God (Jn 16:12-15). Jesus teaches outwardly by the Scriptures, and thus *"His Name is called The Word of God"* (Rev 19:13), and inwardly by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Spirit *"shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you"* (Jn 16:14). Christ being *"The Prophet"* (Deut 18:15, Jn 7:40), bringing the final revelation from God, there is no need for any prophets today.

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING COMING TO CHRIST FOR SALVATION

YOUR RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

The Bible records that there are many different responses to the Gospel message. Some people reject and ridicule it. Others listen politely but are not really interested in eternal matters. Some ask the question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 16:30). What is your response? Do you have a desire to get right with God? Do you want forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life? 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"* (Matt 11:28-29). If you are burdened down with the heavy load of your sins and are seeking rest from it, then you must go to Christ to obtain the relief which He alone can provide. Jesus also said, *"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"* (Jn 6:37). There is no individual who is too hard for Christ to save. And all who genuinely come to Jesus will not be cast out. However, there is a cost involved in being a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke of a "yoke" which you must take up in becoming His disciple. Christ requires submission to Him as Lord or Ruler of your life. People may make fun of you and ridicule your faith. Your friends and family may turn their backs upon you. There will be things in your life which God will require you to give up and stop doing. Jesus said, *"whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be my disciple"* (Lk 14:27). At the same time, there is great happiness in knowing you are right with God and possessing eternal life. If you have seen your need of salvation from sin and you desire to be saved, then you must have *"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21).

YOU ARE COMMANDED TO REPENT OF SIN

"God...now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). It has been pointed out that you are a sinner who violates the Law of God. You think, say, and do things which God forbids. You need to acknowledge that you are a guilty sinner before God. *"For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me"* (Psa 51:3). Repentance is a change of mind which is accompanied by a godly sorrow for your sin. In the Bible, repentance always results in a hating and forsaking of those sins for which you are sorrowful. *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"* (Isa 55:7). You must confess your sins to God. You must acknowledge the vileness of your transgressions. You have the example of the Publican who in anguish over his sin *"smote upon his breast"* praying for forgiveness saying, *"God be merciful to me a sinner"* (Lk 18:13). Also you must be willing to change the direction

of your life and *"do works meet [suitable] for repentance"* (Acts 26:20). In other words, repentance of sin involves a desire to *"return unto the LORD"* and walk in His ways. While repentance is something which God requires of the sinner, you are not able to repent in your own strength. Repentance is the result of divine instruction and a spiritual birth. *"Surely after that I was turned I repented, and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh [in godly sorrow]"* (Jer 31:19). God must grant you repentance unto eternal life as a free gift (Acts 5:31, 11:18, II Tim 2:25-26) or you will perish. What need there is to pray, *"Turn thou me, and I shall be turned"* (Jer 31:18). *"Seek ye the LORD, while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near"* (Isa 55:6). The Lord is known to be merciful and gracious, so go to Him and humbly seek the salvation which He alone can bestow.

YOU MUST BELIEVE IN CHRIST

In answer to the question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 16:30), the apostle Paul said, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:31). What does it mean to believe in Christ? You must understand and accept as true all the Bible has to say about Jesus Christ. For example, you must acknowledge that Jesus is *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matt 16:16) and therefore He is really both God and man. You must accept as fact that *"Christ died for the ungodly"* (Rom 5:6) and that *"He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"* (I Cor 15:4) and is alive today. You must place your trust in Christ alone, rely solely upon His work to make you right with God. You must cast aside all your personal efforts to gain for yourself right standing with God through your so-called good deeds and religious activities. Perhaps you can think of faith this way:

F - Forsaking
A - All other persons or things
I - I
T - Trust
H - Him, Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that *"if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved"* (Rom 10:9). Now placing all your hope in Jesus Christ is something impossible for a proud, stubborn sinner. This is why Jesus said, *"No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me, draw him"* (Jn 6:44). Faith, like repentance, is *"the gift of God"* (Eph 2:8, Phil 1:29, Gal 5:22) and therefore is called *"the faith which is by Him"* (Acts 3:16). What does the Bible say about Lydia coming to faith in Christ? *"A certain woman named Lydia...heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul"* (Acts 16:14). The Spirit of God must open your heart to the Gospel message and grant you the gift of faith or you will never come to Christ. *"But as many as received Him [Christ], to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (Jn 1:12-13). Therefore, if you have come to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior it is a result of being *"born"* or given spiritual life by God. You should thank the Lord that *"the eyes of your understanding"* have been *"enlightened"* for you *"believe according to the working of His mighty power"* (Eph 1:18-19).

YOU CAN FIND JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD

Jesus related a parable concerning justification in Luke 18:10-14: *"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."*

When you realize you are a sinner and truly seek God's mercy found in Christ you will be *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 3:24). To be justified means to be declared righteous in God's sight. In justification an individual is reckoned to be free from all sin and its penalty. God considers you to be as righteous as if you never sinned but always kept His commandments perfectly. The Pharisee was not declared righteous by God because he was trusting in his own works and merits. He did not see any need for God's mercy and grace for he considered himself to be a very good person. If you think in this manner you will perish in your sins for your own righteous acts are as *"filthy rags"* in the sight of God (Isa 64:6). The publican acknowledged that he was a vile, wicked human being. Thus, he does not base his acceptance with God on his own efforts and deeds. No, he cries out in his prayer, *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* And he goes down to his house *"justified"* by God on the basis of what Jesus Christ did, not his own personal righteousness.

This is the wonderful thing about God's salvation. God *"justifieth the ungodly"* (Rom 4:5). *"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin"* (Rom 4:6-8). Jesus grants the believer His perfect righteousness and procures for the believer a full and free pardon of all his or her sins, past, present and future. God counts Christ's perfect obedience and holiness as the believer's. God does not count against the believer his sins because Christ paid the divine penalty due them. *"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"* (II Cor 5:21). *"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?"* (Rom 8:33-34). If you are now trusting in Christ you are in a right relationship with God. *"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom 5:1).

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

You might ask, "How can I know for sure that I possess eternal salvation?" This is an important question for there are many people who profess to know the Lord yet are deceived about their salvation. You must look for evidence of an actual new birth granted by God. *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves"* (II Cor 13:5). The Bible provides a variety of ways to evaluate your spiritual state.

One way would be to consider whether or not you have the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness [and] temperance"* (Gal 5:22-23). Are you different now than you were before you came to know the way of salvation? Do you see these various graces of the Spirit of God displaying themselves in your life?

Another way to know if you have been born again is to consider the passages in I John which speak directly about this matter:

1. Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? - *"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"* (I Jn 5:1).
2. Are you obeying the commands of God? - *"Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him"* (I Jn 2:29).
3. Do you battle against sin so that you are free from habitual sin? - *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin [habitually, see I Jn 1:8-10]"* (I Jn 3:9).
4. Do you love other believers in Christ? - *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"* (I Jn 3:14).
5. Is your faith in Christ such that it is triumphant despite the world's opposition to it? - *"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world"* (I Jn 5:4).
6. Do you carefully watch over the state of your soul? - *"He that is begotten of God keepeth himself"* (I Jn 5:18).

A third way in which you may seek the assurance of your salvation is to evaluate whether or not you have the Beatitudes in your life:

1. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 5:3)

Jesus is not talking about being monetarily poor, but being *"poor in spirit"*. Do you see yourself as spiritually bankrupt? Until you are emptied or depleted of your own goodness and merits you can never be filled with Christ's righteousness. Has the Holy Spirit made you realize that before God you are absolutely nothing so that you cannot boast of your gifts, abilities, and goodness?

2. *"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"* (Matt 5:4)

People mourn for a variety of reasons such as sickness, pain, material loss, wounded pride, loss of a loved one, etc. Jesus is talking about *"godly sorrow"* (II Cor 7:10) here. Once you recognize your spiritual bankruptcy before God do you *"mourn"*? Spiritual mourning is the result of a deep conviction of your sinfulness. Do you groan with the Apostle Paul, *"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* (Rom 7:24).

3. *"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth"* (Matt 5:5)

It is a spirit of mourning, as you become aware of your sinfulness, which in turn leads to a spirit of *"meekness."* Meekness involves humility, gentleness, submissiveness and a mild spirit. Has the Spirit of God produced in you humbleness or do you have a self-centered, domineering, rebellious attitude? Have you been brought into a sweet resignation to the will of God? Is there an absence of a spirit of retaliation in your life? Do you have a teachable spirit? Are you able to see yourself as the *"chief"* of sinners (I Tim 1:15)?

4. *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matt 5:6)

Have you realized there is an emptiness regarding righteousness in your life which needs to be filled? Happiness involves seeking and finding a "righteousness" which comes solely from God (Matt 6:33). Do you desire right standing with God? Do you desire to be holy? Do you desire to be free from sin? Is this a serious desire? Eating and drinking are vital to your physical well-being. To "hunger" and "thirst" for righteousness, therefore, implies that you consider "righteousness" a very vital thing in your life. You seek it diligently, for you cannot do without it. Do you see that by turning to God in faith He can "fill" you with divine righteousness? You can be perfectly clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and be enabled to fellowship with the Lord.

5. *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matt 5:7)

Having been filled with Christ's righteousness you should be a merciful person. Are you a compassionate individual who is moved to relieve the misery of others? Are you able to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn? Do you reach out to others to help them? Are you able to forgive those who wrong you? If you have enjoyed the mercy of God then you will be a person who demonstrates mercy in your own life toward others. Mercy is the inevitable fruit of those who have tasted of God's mercy. Scripture promises, *"With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful"* (Psa 18:25).

6. *"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"* (Matt 5:8)

Religious hypocrites are only concerned about outward morality in order to look good before others. The heart in the Bible is the center of your inner life. It involves your mind, conscience, affections and will. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"* (Jer 17:9) and therefore it needs to be made "pure" by God - *"Create in me a clean heart, O God"* (Psa 51:10). Purity of heart does not mean you can reach a state of sinless perfection in this life. It does mean that the Holy Spirit has given you a new holy nature, faith in Christ, a cleansed conscience and He continues to produce spiritual fruit within you. The Spirit constantly works within believers *"purifying their hearts by faith"* (Acts 15:9). Do you have a heart that is dedicated to serving Jesus Christ? Do you pursue *"righteousness, faith, charity [and] peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (II Tim 2:22)? Do you love holiness? Do you desire to be Christ-like?

7. *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matt 5:9)

If you are enjoying peace with God because of what Christ has done on the cross, you will now wish to live in peace with all men. Do you carefully follow the teaching, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"* (Rom 12:18)? Before coming to know Jesus Christ you were a selfish person who lived *"in malice and envy, hateful, and hating"* others (Tit 3:3). Being changed by God's grace will make you actively *"follow [pursue] peace with all men"* (Heb 12:14). You will attempt to guard your tongue so that you are not offensive. You will avoid returning *"railing for railing"* (I Pet 3:9) and being a gossip (Prov 26:20). Do you consider how your words or actions will affect your friends, family, neighbors, etc.? Do you look for ways and means to make peace? *"If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink...Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Rom 12:20-

21). Can you pray for those who have wronged you and despitefully used you pitying them in their sinful state? God is a "God of peace" (Heb 13:20) and therefore His true children demonstrate themselves to be peacemakers.

8. *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 5:10)

If you have been saved by God's grace you will be merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker. You will begin to display the holy characteristics of God in your life. The ungodly world around you will react to this in a negative manner. Jesus said about His disciples, *"Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake"* (Matt 10:22). One of the telltale signs that you are in Christ's kingdom is persecution by the world. People may *"separate you from their company"* (Lk 6:22) so that you are excluded and left out. Even family and friends may snub you. People may *"reproach you"* (Lk 6:22) so that you are slandered, misrepresented, despised, hated, and defamed. Do you find that this world holds a grudge against you and your stand for Christ? Do you find that you stand out as someone who is different from those around you and that this is resented by others?

Thus, the Bible teaches that assurance of salvation is not a matter of pointing to a day when you walked down an aisle during an evangelistic meeting or when you prayed a special prayer. The emphasis of Scripture is on seeing a change in your life caused by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the graces He imparts. Do you see the Beatitudes in your life? Then you have evidence of the work of God's grace within you. For this you can rejoice and give praise to God!

WHAT TO DO AFTER COMING TO FAITH IN CHRIST

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor 5:17). Once you have come to know the Lord you are now a different person than you were before. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who has granted you a new spiritual birth and you are adopted into the family of God. Your sins are all washed away and you are eternally secure. Now you have some important things to do as basic steps in the growth of your new spiritual life.

1. If you do not have a Bible, you need to obtain one and begin to read it. The King James Version, the New King James Version or the Modern King James Version are recommended. The Bible is God's Word and the means by which He will speak to you. In this Holy Book you will find everything necessary to live the Christian life and do what pleases God (II Tim 3:16-17). The Bible is the sole authority for your faith and practice. *"If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isa 8:20). You might consider reading first the Gospel of John which was specifically written *"that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name"* (Jn 20:31).
2. You must daily speak to God as your Father in prayer. Prayer consists of various elements and it would be helpful to ponder the content of the prayers found in the Bible. Jesus provided a model prayer after which you can pattern your own (Matt 6:9-13). A simple way to approach prayer is to use the acronym ACTS:

A - Adoration of God: Praise God for His power, holiness, truth, grace, etc.

C - Confession of sin: No Christian is perfect. You will daily sin and you must confess your sin and ask God to forgive you.

T - Thanksgiving: You should thank the Lord for your salvation and the everyday benefits you enjoy.

S - Supplication: You will need help, strength, and guidance and so will your fellow believers. You should also pray for unsaved people who need to know Jesus Christ, just like you once did.

3. You should immediately seek to find a Biblical church. Christ has gifted His church with pastors and teachers so that you may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. God expects you to worship Him. You will also come into contact with other believers who can provide counsel and support in your Christian life. The church will teach you about God's special directions concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper. Choosing the right church may not be easy. There are a lot of churches but sadly few of them are concerned about Biblical truth. Look for a church which clearly believes and teaches the truths found in the Bible.

