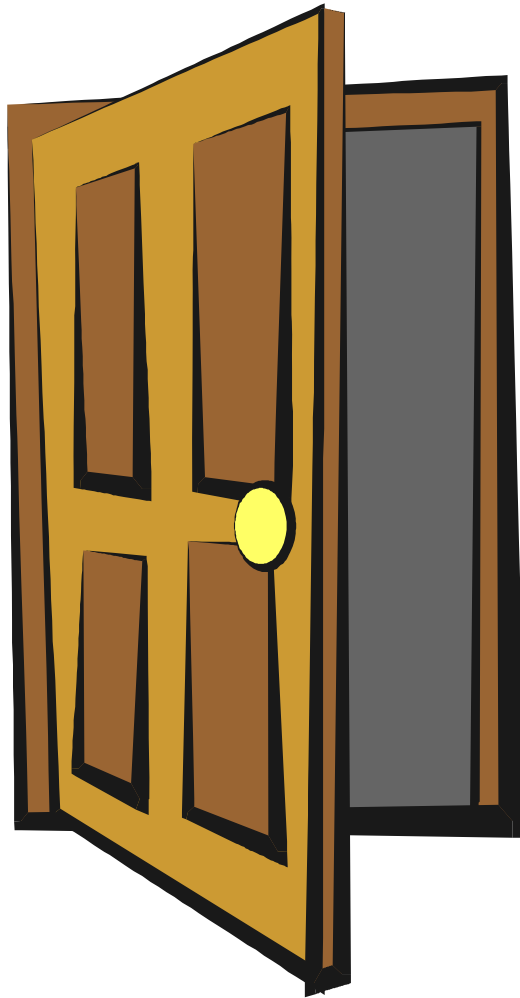


Do-It-Yourself

Home Bible Study



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Letter to the Reader

Do you believe in God? Do you want to go to Heaven when you die? If the end of the world happens today...are you ready to face God?

The answers to all spiritual questions are in the Bible. It is the Word of God. It is the way God talks to people today. It contains the good news of salvation. You can find the Truth by reading the entire Bible; however, that takes a long time. This Bible study guide is intended as a shortcut to help you find answers.

What do you need? Maybe you want to have a close relationship with God, but don't know how. Maybe you've tried to read the Bible, but it is just too hard to understand. Maybe the fact that there are so many different religions confuses you. How can everybody be right when one religion says one thing and another says something totally different?

As you read this study guide, pray for God's guidance and wisdom. May God bless you as you learn the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Chapter 1

Who is God?

Who is God?

No one knows where God came from and how He came to be. Yet, the Bible tells us that we must believe that He exists. What does the Bible say about God?

- He made the whole world and everything that is in it. *In the beginning God* (not man, not idols, not just by chance) *created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1
- *The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.* Isaiah 40:28 God is all-knowing. (He knows everything!)
- He is holy (only good; sinless; worthy of all respect and honor; awesome) and He is the King. He is the only God there is. He wants to save you! Isaiah 43:11-13 and verse 15
- *God is love.* 1 John 4:8 Isn't that comforting to know that the Power of the Universe, "the Force" that is in control of the world, is loving... not cruel or evil?
- No one has ever seen God. He is invisible. Look what is written in 1 Timothy 6:15, 16: *God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who alone is immortal* (always alive, will never die) *and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.*
- Then why are we expected to believe in God, if we can't even see him? Think about this: You already believe in lots of things that you can't see. For example, you can't see wind, but you can see the effects of it when it shakes the leaves on the trees and makes a kite fly. Next time there is a windy day, look around you. You can't see the wind, but you can see what it is doing all around you. Another example is pain. You can't see it, but you know it is there when you are hurt. You can't see microwaves because they are invisible, but you can see that they cook your food. You can't see cold, but you believe it exists when you see water freeze into ice. You can't see helium, but you *can* see a balloon. Fill the balloon with invisible helium and watch what it does! This is what the Bible is telling us in Romans 1:20: *For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly SEEN, being*

*understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. So, from the things God has made in our universe, we can see that there is a God. For example, Psalm 19 says *the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands*. Look at nature: Who can make a powerful thunderstorm? Who can make the mountains? Who can make the ocean, as huge and deep as it is? Can you? Can any human do that? Of course not! Who can make the planets revolve around the sun, and the moon revolve around the earth? Who can hang the stars in the sky? Who could ever think up all the different kinds of plants: vegetables, flowers, trees, bushes, grasses, wheat, cotton, etc. etc. and then make them grow in their seasons? Who on earth can "make" an elephant, or even a tiny ant? Look around you, God is everywhere!!*

- Another way we can see God is found in 1 John 4:12. *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us (Wow!) and his love for us is made complete. You can't see love, but you know it exists, don't you?*
- If you would like to read what God says about himself, read in the book of Job, chapters 38 - 41. It was written to Job and his friends when they questioned who God really was, and when they, who were only HUMANS, questioned who was really in charge! Take time to read it. You will find out about the power of God and how wonderfully he made the whole world.
- There are many, many verses in the Bible that teach you about God and who He is. The answers to your questions will be found in His Word. Read the Bible and get to know God.

Chapter 2

How to Study the Bible

How to Study the Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. It is God's "instruction manual" on how to be saved (how to go to heaven), and how to worship Him in the correct way. The Bible is the ONLY authority we must follow because it is the true Word of God. As you read the Scriptures in the lessons, let God speak to you! He knows who you are. He loves you. And, he is talking to YOU, personally!

2 Timothy 3:16 says: *All Scripture (the whole Bible) is God-breathed (it came right from the mouth of God) and is useful for teaching, rebuking (showing us our sin), correcting (what to do about sin), and training in righteousness (learning how to do right), so that the man of God (you!) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (to do all the things God wants you to do).*

The Bible is the greatest miracle of all time. It is filled with saving power. It speaks to *all* people of *all* races, throughout *all* time! It has been carefully preserved through the centuries, so that we, today, can read the same words that God wrote (through men) hundreds of years ago! However, it is not outdated or too old to have meaning for us today. 1 Peter 1:23 says the Bible is the living and enduring Word of God. Did you get that? It is **LIVING**, not dead and unimportant.

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us that we must study the Bible and know how to use it. *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* Someone once said, "How embarrassing it would be to stand before God on the Judgment Day and say, 'I'm sorry I never read your book.' " (Is 75 or 80 years just not long enough to read through the Bible? Think about that!)

When you study the Bible, watch out for attitudes that can get in your way. Don't begin with the idea "I'll read it, but I'll only believe what I want to believe." God says that kind of pride is wrong. Romans 1:18-21 tells of men who suppress the truth (don't believe it or obey it) by the evil things that they do and think. It says that even though men knew God, they didn't honor Him or give thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile (useless) and their foolish hearts were darkened. In other words, because of their pride, sin lived in them instead of the love of God. And they were lost! Instead, we should conform (be submissive, obedient) to God, and do what HE wants instead of what WE want! (James 4:6-8)

When you study the Scriptures, keep an open mind. Be careful not to have the attitude of "pre-judging" or reaching a conclusion before all the facts are in. Some say, "Don't confuse me with a lot of Bible verses. My mind is already made up about what I believe." Or, some may say, "I'll always believe what my parents and grandparents believed. It's tradition!" And others rely only on the things their minister says, never reading the Word for themselves. Allow yourself to think about this: You can't hold your preacher's hand and get into heaven! Each person must answer to the Lord. It is YOUR responsibility to learn the Truth and live it.

There are examples in the Bible of people who pre-judged Jesus... In John 1:45-46, Philip told Nathanael that he had found the Christ, a man named Jesus, of the town of Nazareth. And Nathanael said, "Can anything GOOD come from Nazareth?" See, he was pre-judging! Something good *did* come from Nazareth...the Savior, Jesus! And, in Mark 6:1-6, Jesus went to preach and teach and do miracles in his own hometown where he grew up. But, many people just couldn't believe that he was the Son of God. They knew his mom and his brothers and sisters. They said, "What's this wisdom that has been given to him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son?" and they didn't believe in him. And verse 6 says that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith! They were pre-judging that since they had known him from the time he was a little boy, and since he just seemed like an ordinary carpenter (a regular guy, not a king or celebrity), he couldn't possibly be the Son of God. But they were wrong! Test every religious idea by the Bible. If what someone is telling you is different from what God says in the Bible, then you must believe the Bible instead of man.

Don't let anyone pressure you (force you) into becoming a Christian. That is something only YOU can decide for yourself. The only thing that should have the power to touch your life and change you is the Word of God in your heart. The power is in the message (the Bible), not in the messenger (the person teaching you). Romans 1:16 says, *I am not ashamed of the gospel (the good news of Jesus), because it is the POWER of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (everyone, including YOU).*" James 1:21 says we must humbly accept the Word of God, "which can save you". And the next verse says, *Do not merely listen to the Word...do what it says.* So, let the Bible convict you (touch you, teach you, move you to do what is right), as you find out what God is saying to you.

Picture this: the Bible is God's library. It contains 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. It was written by about 40 or so men. 2 Peter 1:20 says that the Bible was written by men whom God chose. God, through his Holy Spirit, told the men what to write. It wasn't man's words and ideas; it was God's.

The Bible is a wonderful storybook and all the stories are true. It is perfectly united all the way through. There is one continuing message throughout the Bible, which is:

Jesus is coming! Jesus is here! Jesus is coming again!

The theme is that Jesus, the Son of God, was sent to earth on a special mission: to save you and I. This theme is told in three parts. The Old Testament reveals the news that a Savior is going to come into the world someday. In the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the Bible is saying, "The Savior is here!" Each of those four books tell the story of the time in history when Jesus, the Son of God, came and lived on earth as a man, then returned to Heaven. The rest of the New Testament from Acts to Revelation tells us that the Savior is coming back again someday! Keep this theme in mind as you explore the Old and New Testaments.

Many people decide that they want to read the Bible, but they don't know where to begin. Some feel intimidated and overwhelmed by such a long book. Some just read a few pages here and there and never get the "big picture" of what is happening, so they feel that it is just too hard to understand. The next two chapters will give you a brief overview of what the Bible is about. Get an idea of the history (the true, continuing story) of the Bible. Then when you begin reading the Bible for yourself, the details will make more sense to you. Be patient with yourself! Don't expect to understand everything the first time. The more you read the Bible, the more you will understand. Read it over and over. Make it a habit! Set aside a special time each day to let God's Word soak in.

Chapter 3

The Old Testament

The Old Testament

This is Part 1 of the Continuing Theme of the Bible: *Jesus is Coming!*

Let's start with the Old Testament. One very important thing is taught all the way through, and that is the "lineage" of Jesus Christ; in other words, the ancestors or forefathers of the family through which Jesus would some day be born. Many people today enjoy researching their own genealogy: finding out who their ancestors are and where they were from, etc. If you studied your own genealogy, you might find out that your family history is very interesting. You might learn that your ancestors lived in another country, or maybe that they moved from place to place. Perhaps some were kings, or famous soldiers, or just hard-working pioneers! It would be interesting to see how, through time, sons and daughters were born, then grandchildren (and so on) and how the family tree ends up with YOU! Well, in that same way, the Old Testament is the history that goes along with Jesus' family tree! Notice all the way through how God protects and preserves a whole nation of people, the Jews. It is through this large family of people, this holy nation, that Jesus was to come into the world.

In Genesis, we learn that God created the whole world and everything in it. Adam was the first man. Eve was the first woman. They sinned by disobeying God's command, and God made them leave the beautiful Garden of Eden. Their son, Cain, killed his brother, Abel. That was the first murder. (See how sin came into the picture right from the beginning?) Another of Adam and Eve's sons was named Seth. From Seth's family, years and years later, there came a man named Noah. Noah was a righteous man. God told Noah to build an ark, and he and his family (only 8 people) were saved from the flood (water covered the whole earth). Everyone else on earth was destroyed because of sin! (You can read about Noah in Genesis 6, 7, and 8) Then the whole world started over!

One of Noah's sons was named Shem. Many years later, Shem's descendant (great-great-great-etc.-grandson) was Abraham. God made 3 promises to this man, Abraham. Genesis 12:1-7 says that God told him that (1) he was going to be the father of a great nation of people (the Jews), (2) he and his descendants would inherit land, and (3) that some day all nations of the earth would be blessed through his family (by the coming of Jesus centuries later).

See? God had a plan!

So, this is how the promise of Abraham being the father of a great nation began to come true...

Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. (God changed Jacob's name to Israel.) Israel, or Jacob, had twelve sons. Each of the twelve sons became the father of many people, many descendants...so they were called the twelve tribes of Israel. These people became known as the Israelites, or Jews, and are sometimes also called Hebrews.

One of those twelve brothers, Joseph, was sold into slavery and was taken far away to Egypt. God was with Joseph and worked things out for him so well, that he became the second most powerful man in Egypt, next to the king! God gave Joseph the ability to understand a dream that the king had. The dream was a warning that a great drought (famine) was coming. There would be 7 good years for the Egyptians to store up food, then there would be 7 years with no rain and the crops could not grow. So the Egyptians were prepared (ready) for the famine. Once it came, Joseph's eleven brothers, back at home, ran out of food. They traveled to Egypt to buy food there. They didn't recognize Joseph because now he looked like an Egyptian! After a while, Joseph told them who he was and forgave them for selling him as a slave. He realized that God had chosen him to save his family and many other people. Joseph gave them food and told them that they should move all their families to Goshen (in Egypt) where there would be food for them during the famine. So the Israelites (Joseph's eleven brothers and their wives and children, plus their father, Jacob) all moved there (Genesis 37-50).

After Joseph and his family died, their children and grandchildren and so on, continued to live in Egypt for over 400 years. The Israelites grew into a huge nation of people. At this time, they were made to be slaves of the Egyptians. The Egyptians were very cruel and mean to them. God chose a special man to save them. His name was Moses. With God's help, Moses led the Israelites, 600,000 men plus their wives and children, out of Egypt. (See? Just as God had promised, Abraham's family had become a great nation...and it was still growing!) You can read the story of Moses leading the Israelite nation out of Egypt in Exodus, chapters 7 - 12. The rest of the book of Exodus tells of the trials and troubles the Israelites had on their way out of Egypt to the Promised Land (the land of Canaan that God had promised to Abraham many years earlier).

While on their journey, God gave the Ten Commandments (and the other laws for the Israelites) to Moses up on top of Mount Sinai. These became known as the Law of Moses, and all Israelites (Jews) were to obey them. God claimed the Israelite nation to be his specially chosen, holy people, out of all the other nations on earth. God commanded them to make a special tent which was to be their "church building." It was called the Tabernacle. They carried it with them on their journey to Canaan. Men from the tribe of Levi (called Levites) were chosen to work in the Tabernacle. Some of them were priests.

Moses died, and Joshua became the leader of the Israelites. Then God's second promise to Abraham came true. God gave the Israelite nation the land of Canaan, the land he had promised to Abraham, many, many years before. They entered the land and God helped them fight many battles to drive out the people who were already living there. After a time, they divided up the land, giving sections of it to each of the twelve tribes.

Joshua 21:43-45 says, So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

During the years ahead, the Israelites living in the Promised Land went through good and bad times. Sometimes they turned their backs on God, and worshipped idols instead. Idols are man-made gods...statues of gold, silver or wood that are worshipped as if they were real. People worshipped gods of the harvest, gods of the sea, gods of the sun, moon and stars, gods of fertility, etc. In the law that God gave to Moses for the Jews to follow, He forbid them to worship idols or make the statues (called graven images). God punished them for disobeying Him. He sent their enemies to take over the country and make life miserable for them. The Israelites (Jews) would cry out to God, and God would send a judge (a ruler) for the people, to lead them in the right way. Then all was well for a time, until that judge died. Later, they would repeat the whole thing again: worshipping idols, being conquered by their enemies, crying out to God, and being saved by another judge. This went on for years.

Then the people asked for a king. They wanted to be like other nations. That made God sad, because He was their king. However, God allowed them to have one. The first king of Israel was Saul. He did not follow God's commands and the kingdom was taken away from him. The next king was David. This is the one who, when he was a young man, fought and killed the giant, Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) David is considered to be the greatest king that Israel ever had. He was called "a man after God's own heart." God renewed the promise to Abraham by telling David that through his family, the Savior (Jesus) would someday come into the world. See how the theme, "Someone is coming!" continues throughout the Old Testament?

David's son, Solomon, was the next king. He asked God for wisdom to rule the Israelites and God made Solomon the wisest man that had ever lived! (Read about that in 1 Kings 3 and also in chapter 4, verses 29-34.) Solomon built the Temple, a beautiful building in which the Israelites worshipped God. This replaced the Tabernacle (the tent which had been their "church building" before).

Once again, the people in the Promised Land began to worship idols. Even King Solomon did, so God punished them by dividing the kingdom. The ten tribes of Israel to the north were now called the country of Israel, and the two tribes to the south were called Judah. The Bible tells us about this time period in which there were many bad kings who led the people to worship idols. Sometimes, though, there were good kings who tried to lead the people back to God. During this time, God sent prophets. Prophets were men that God chose to deliver special messages to the people. God told the prophets what to say and allowed them to know what would happen in the future. One of the messages God sent through the prophets was (remember this?) that someday a Savior (Jesus) would come into the world. (The theme continues!)

The prophets also had another important message. They warned the people that if they did not stop worshipping idols, God would destroy their nation, and those left alive would be taken into slavery by their enemies. And that is exactly what happened. First the northern tribes (Israel) were captured by the Assyrian army and taken into slavery. Then about a hundred years later, the southern tribes (Judah) were overpowered by a huge army from the country of Babylon. The Babylonians killed many people, burned the Temple, and knocked down the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. The Israelites who did survive were taken away as slaves to live in exile in Babylon.

The people were slaves in Babylon for 70 years as punishment for their idol worship. God loved his people and He forgave them. He allowed them to come back to the Promised Land again. They were happy to return, but they came back to find their cities destroyed and in ruins. They had to rebuild their homes, the Temple, and the walls around the city of Jerusalem. They had to learn all over again how to worship God correctly, instead of worshipping idols. The Israelites were now fewer in number, but God saved a remnant (a small part left over) to carry on the promise that through this nation all people would be blessed (with the coming of Christ).

The Jews continued to live in Israel until the coming of Christ, several centuries later.

Chapter 4

The New Testament

The New Testament

Remember the third promise God made to Abraham? It was that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed. That promise came true when Jesus was born. Jesus was a Jew. He was a descendant of Abraham, and from the same family as King David. Look at the genealogy (family history) of Jesus in Matthew 1: 1-17. See if you can find the names you have learned about in Jesus' family history: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah (one of the twelve sons, or tribes) in verses 2 and 3. Then look in verse 6...see King David, then Solomon? Then verse 11 and 12 show where the exile (the time of being slaves in Babylon) fits into the history of Jesus' family.

Scan down through the other names, and who is the last one listed, in verse 16? JESUS CHRIST!

The spiritual promise was that this Jesus would bless *all nations*. That promise came true and is still in effect today! Galatians 3:28 says, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all ONE in Christ Jesus.* (ALL people can be saved through Jesus!) *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed (descendent) and heirs according to the promise.* That promise that God made to Abraham hundreds and hundreds of years ago, was made to YOU, too! You can be saved from your sins by Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ!

This is Part 2 of the Continuing Theme in the Bible: *Jesus is here!*

The first four books of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are called the gospels. Gospel means "good news." The good news was (and still is) that the Savior had finally come into the world. Each one of these four books tells the same story: the life of Jesus while he was on earth. Why are there four gospel accounts instead of just one? For example, suppose you and three other people went on a snow-skiing vacation. When you came back home, suppose someone asked all four of you to write about it. Each of the stories would tell the same thing, but from different points of view. One of you might tell about the icy roads on the way up there. Two of you might both tell of the big snowfall the night you got there. Another person might tell of the crowds of people that were there. Three of you might tell about the conditions of the slopes. All four of you would probably include the story of the person in the group who ran into a tree and had to go to the hospital! All four written accounts of the trip would be true stories,

but some would include things that others wouldn't, and sometimes all four would include the same event. That's the way it is with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four men, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote the story of the life of Jesus. Sometimes they wrote about an event that only their book includes. Sometimes the same stories are repeated in another gospel account, or in three of them, or in all four. They do not, however, contradict each other. That is, they are all correct and accurate, and, when "blended" together, they give the true picture of what happened when Jesus came to earth.

Although Jesus is the Son of God and called the King of Kings, he was born in a very private, humble way (not in a palace like a king). He was born in a stable. His mother was Mary and his father was actually, God. (Read Luke, chapters 1 and 2.) Mary's husband, and Jesus' earthly father, was Joseph. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, but were in Bethlehem at this time to register because it was the law. They had to come to Bethlehem because that was the city of David, and they were his descendants. (Remember that Jesus was to come through the family of David?) So Jesus was born while they were there. There was no room for them in the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable! Shepherds came and worshipped him. Some time later, the wise men, who followed a special star, found Jesus, worshipped him, and brought him gifts.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth with his brothers and sisters. When he became an adult, about 30 or so years old, he began his ministry. He chose twelve apostles. These were men that helped Jesus in his work. God gave Jesus the power to do miracles so that people would believe that he was the Son of God. He walked on water, calmed a thunderstorm, healed many people of their diseases, turned water into wine, and fed 5,000 people with one little boys' lunch! He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and even raised people from the dead! (Matthew 11:2-6) None of these things could have happened naturally. They were supernatural events done by God's power.

Jesus went around from town to town teaching people. Many people believed in him, but some didn't. In fact, many Jews were very angry with him, and jealous of him, so they planned to kill him. They took him to the government officials and charged him with crimes that he didn't commit. He was sentenced to death on the cross (crucifixion). The soldiers nailed his hands and feet to a wooden cross and he hung there for several hours in severe pain. It was torture, a very cruel way to die.

(Read John 19 and Luke 23) However, it was all part of the plan God had to save the world. When Jesus died on the cross, he took OUR punishment. We (all people) are sinners. We are guilty and we deserve to die for disobeying God. But God loves us so much, that he allowed his precious Son to die in our place (John 3:16). Jesus paid the debt that we owed. He didn't deserve to die because he was a perfect, sinless man. But, he gave up his life because he wanted to...for YOU. He wants you to be forgiven and go to Heaven! What a wonderful gift!!

Jesus died and was buried in a tomb. On the third day after his death, he was resurrected (came back to life). He appeared to many people to prove he was no longer dead. He stayed on earth for 40 days and then his followers saw him go up into heaven! (Read about the ascension in Luke 24:50, 51) Before he left, he told his apostles and other followers, *Go into all the world and preach the gospel (good news) to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (heaven), but whoever does not believe will be condemned (hell).* That's in Mark 16: 15, 16.

This is Part 3 of the Continuing Theme of the Bible: *Jesus is Coming Again!*

The book of Acts begins at that point, the time when Jesus went up into heaven. A few days later, the apostles received the Holy Spirit (a portion of God's power) and they taught many people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday, so many people, even visitors from other countries, were there that day. God miraculously gave the apostles the ability to speak in all the different languages of the people who were there! One of the apostles, Peter, spoke up and told the crowd that Jesus Christ, the man whom they had recently crucified, was really the Son of God! He told them that they had done a terrible thing to make a sinless man die for crimes he didn't commit. Then Peter told them that Jesus died in order to keep a promise God had made, and that Jesus' death had been predicted long ago by the prophets of the Old Testament. This was all part of God's plan. He told them that this Jesus had been raised from the dead and now lived in Heaven with God. Many people understood the importance of what Peter was saying. They realized they had sinned greatly by killing the Son of God. They were "cut to the heart" (felt guilty and sorry). They asked what they should do. Peter told them, *Repent (stop doing wrong) and be baptized (immersed under water), every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, (WHY?)... for the forgiveness of your sins.* And that day about 3,000 people were saved. They became Christians (followers of Jesus). That was the day the church began (Acts, chapter 2).

From that day on, the apostles went from town to town teaching people about Jesus. These stories are in the book of Acts. Many people believed and were baptized, so the church grew in numbers. At that time, there also came persecution for Christians. People who were against the ways of Jesus were cruel to his followers. They put Christians in jail, killed some, tortured others...just because they believed in Jesus. One of those who were persecuting Christians was Saul (his name was later changed to Paul). Jesus spoke to Paul from Heaven, and told him to stop the persecutions. Jesus had a great plan for Paul's life. Paul, himself, was baptized and became a Christian (Acts 9). He became a great preacher, telling of the love and salvation of Jesus. He went from town to town and country to country teaching people how to become Christians and helping them to form local churches. He was often persecuted for being a follower of Jesus (just like he had formerly persecuted other Christians)! He spent several years in prison. During this time, he wrote many letters to the churches that he had helped to establish. These letters later became several of the New Testament books (Romans through Philemon)

Other men also wrote letters to Christians. Their letters became part of the New Testament, too (Hebrews through Jude). The letters contain important instructions about how to live the Christian life.

The last book of the New Testament is Revelation. It is a book of prophecy. Revelation tells us what heaven is like. The message of the book is that, in the end, good will win over the evil that is in this world. God will win over Satan (the devil).

Chapter 5

What does all this
have to do with me?

What Does All This Have to do with Me?

Now you know the whole story of the Bible. What does God expect you to do with this information? First of all, you must believe that God exists and that the Bible is actually the Word of God. God provided us with the Bible so that He could talk to us and tell us what he expects us to do. So, the bottom line is, do you accept the Bible as God's Word? Do you agree that God is the only authority (He's the boss), and that you must obey what God tells you to do? If so, then read on to find out what to do.

The Bible says that *all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God...* (Romans 3:23). That means that you must admit that you, too, are a sinner. The word *sin* means "to miss the mark" (like if you were shooting an arrow at a target and missed). Sin is doing what's wrong, disobeying the laws of God. God is perfect and sinless. We, who are full of sin, are not worthy to live in God's presence (in Heaven) because sin and God don't "mix." Isaiah 59:2 says that sin separates us from God. The punishment for sin is spiritual death, which is hell. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says that those who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel, will be punished with everlasting destruction (hell), shut out from the presence of the Lord.

Is Hell Real?

Everlasting destruction...forever and ever being in hell...what a horrible thing! Try to imagine eternity...that's hard, because it seems that everything we know has an end. But eternity lasts forever... on and on and on, never ending. Since it never ends, there will be no second chances. If you continue to live in sin while on the earth, the Bible says you will be punished in hell. Some people don't believe there is a hell. Some even joke about it. And some don't believe that a loving God would send people to such a horrible place. But remember, it's *your own sin* that separates you from God and condemns you to hell. And, that "loving God" DID provide a way of escape for you, but if you turn your back on Him, you will not be saved. God has done his part (Jesus' death on the cross), but you must do your part! Is hell real? Let's see what the Bible says about hell:

- Hell is fire. (Matthew 5:22) It is called a lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15) It is also described as a lake of burning sulfur in Revelation 21:8. Have you ever seen a volcano on TV? The lava is a lake of fire and burning sulfur.

- There will be weeping (crying) and gnashing of teeth (like people grind their teeth when they are in great pain). Matthew 13:41, 42
- Matthew 22:13 and 25:30 says there will be darkness. How can there be darkness if there is fire? Imagine a blind man in a burning building.
- Jesus told a story about a man in hell. He said that the man was in agony in the fire. The man begged for someone to be sent back to earth to warn his brothers so they wouldn't come to "this place of torment." (Luke 16:19-31)
- It is eternal. That is, it will last forever and ever. No end. No second chances (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
- Those in hell will be shut out from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
- Who will be there? Matthew 25:41 says that Satan (the devil) will be there. Revelations 21:8 says all these will go to hell: *the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile (wicked, evil people), the murderers, the sexually immoral (people who have sex with someone they are not married to), those who practice magic arts (witchcraft), the idolaters (those who worship idols instead of God) and all liars.* 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 says, *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (fooled): Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders (gays and lesbians), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers (people who falsely accuse and run other people down), nor swindlers (people who cheat) will inherit the kingdom of God.*
Again, 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says that God will punish those who do not know Him and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
There will even be people there who *do* believe in God, but have not done what He says. Jesus said in Matthew 7: 21, *Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father.*

You see, it would be a horrible thing to spend eternity in hell! Many people refuse to believe that there is a hell. They are like children, hiding their eyes. Just because a person doesn't believe that it's there, doesn't make it go away! Hell is real!

Is Heaven real?

It's a lot easier to believe in Heaven. Everyone wants to believe that when they die, they will go to a beautiful, wonderful place for eternity. What does the Bible say

about Heaven? As you read below, notice the differences between Heaven and Hell:

- Heaven is paradise! (2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7) *Hell: A place of torment*
- Heaven is described as a city of gold with foundations of precious jewels, gates made of pearl, and streets of gold. (Revelation 21:18-21) *Hell: A lake of fire*
- Heaven is described as a place of rest. (Hebrews 4:10,11) *Hell: A place of agony*
- There will be no night in Heaven, but there will also be no sun or moon, for the glory of God is the light. (Revelation 21:23-25) *Hell: Darkness*
- There will be no death, no mourning (grieving), no crying, and no pain! (Revelation 21: 4) *Hell: Weeping and gnashing of teeth*
- Nothing impure or evil will be in Heaven. (Revelation 21:27) *Hell: Full of evil, wicked people*
- Heaven is eternal, everlasting, never ending. (2 Peter 1:11) It is described as eternal LIFE! (1 John 2:25) *Hell: Also never-ending*
- God lives in Heaven. Everyone there will see Him and live in His presence (Revelation 21:3 and 22:3). *Hell: The absence of God*
- Jesus lives in Heaven, and invites us to come. (John 14:1-3) *Hell: Satan (the devil) lives there.*
- Angels live in Heaven. (Mark 12:25) *Hell: The devil's angels (demons) live there.*
- Who else will be there?
The saved will be there. That is, people who: believe in Jesus, (Acts 16:31), repent of (turn away from) their sins (Acts 2:38), confess (admit by saying it) that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:9,10), are baptized (immersed in water to wash away sins) (1 Peter 3:21), and who continue to live faithfully to God (Revelation 2:10). (This will be discussed more later.) *Hell: Wicked (evil) people, unbelievers, and those who do not obey God, even "religious" people who do not correctly follow God's Word.*

So, you see, the good news is that Heaven is real, too! Now that you know what the Bible says about Heaven and Hell, where do you want to spend eternity? You only have a choice as long as you live in this life. Once you die, your opportunity to get in a right relationship with God will be over. Also remember that no one knows when the Second Coming of Jesus will be. It could be today! Are you ready? Keep reading...

Chapter 6

What Must I Do to be Saved?

What Must I Do to be Saved?

Since we are all sinners, and sin and God cannot exist together, then how can a person be saved from hell? What do you have to do to get to heaven? Jesus paid the price for your sins when he died on the cross. That's God's gift of mercy (forgiving you even though you don't deserve it). But now, you must do *your* part. You must come into contact with that saving blood of Jesus. It is that sacrifice of Jesus' blood that saves you! John 1:29 says that Jesus takes away the sins of the world. Ephesians 1:7 says that forgiveness of sins comes through the blood of Jesus.

Step 1: Hear (Understand) the Word of God

You are taking this step right now by learning about the Bible and what God's will is for you. You must believe that the Bible, and *only* the Bible, is the authority for telling us what God wants us to do...not what men say, not what any council or board decides, not man-made traditions, but ONLY God's Word. Read it. Study it. Pray to God and ask him to help you understand it, and He will! (James 1:5,6)

Romans 10:13-14 says, *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* Then verse 17 says, *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* So when you read the Bible and hear (understand) the good news of Jesus, it produces FAITH. James 1:22 says that we should not only be hearers of the Word, but that we must do what it says! (Read on.)

Step 2: Believe!

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says "Now faith is being SURE of what we HOPE for and CERTAIN of what we do not see." Read the whole chapter of Hebrews 11. It tells how great men in the Old Testament believed in God and showed it in their lives. Faith means believing that God is real and alive and "in charge." Faith is believing that the Bible is really His Word. Faith is believing that Jesus Christ, that baby born in a manger, is truly the Son of God. It is believing that Jesus is the Savior...YOUR Savior! Hebrews 11:6 says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* And again in John 8:24, Jesus said, *...if you do not believe that I am the one I*

claim to be (God's Son), you will indeed die in your sins (go to hell). Mark 16:16 says that people who do not believe will be condemned. So, it is very important to believe in God and in Jesus. Do you believe?

Step 3: Repent of Your Sins

What does it mean to repent of your sins? It means you must first be sorry for the wrong things you have done. But, it also means that you make a decision to change, to do what is right. It is a change of mind, a change of heart. It is like driving north on a road, then making a U-turn and driving south. It is a commitment to try to be the kind of person God wants you to be. Yes, you will fail at times. It doesn't mean that you will always be perfect, but it is a promise to TRY to be perfect. It is a decision to get out of "the business of sinning"...changing your lifestyle to honor God. Luke 13:3 says, *But unless you repent, you too will all perish* (die in your sins). Acts 17:30 says that God COMMANDS all men everywhere to repent.

2 Corinthians 7:10 says, Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation.

Here's a story from the New Testament that explains repentance. Luke 19 tells of a short man named Zacchaeus. He heard that Jesus was coming through town and he wanted to see him, but he could not see over the crowds. So, he climbed up in a tree. When Jesus saw him, he said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus was thrilled and took Jesus home with him. Zacchaeus was a tax collector and was wealthy. Many tax collectors of that day got rich by charging too much for taxes and putting the extra money in their pockets. But Zacchaeus repented of doing wrong. He not only felt sorry, but he changed his life. Verse 8 says, *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'* Then Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus changed his ways to follow Jesus. Are you willing to do that?

Step 4: Confess that Jesus is Your Savior

You must also confess (say with your own mouth) that you believe Jesus is the Savior, the Son of God. Many Christians made that confession and were killed for it: thrown to the lions, or burned, or beheaded. Jesus, himself, confessed that He was truly the Son of God, and they killed him for it. (Luke 22:66-71) You must prove your love for Jesus by standing up for him and not being afraid to say that

you believe. Some people may laugh at you or disagree with you or stop being friends with you because you stand up for Jesus. Romans 10:9-10 says, *...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified (counted as 'not guilty' of sin), and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.* Jesus said in Matthew 10:32, *Whoever acknowledges me (stands up for me) before men, I will also acknowledge him (stand up for him) before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me (is ashamed of me, turns his back on me) before men, I will disown him before my Father in Heaven.*

Are you willing to stand up for Jesus and tell others that you believe in him?

Step 5: Be Baptized

The word "baptize" (in the original Greek language that the New Testament comes from) means "to immerse, to dip, or to plunge." Baptism means being immersed, completely covered, in water. Why does God require us to be baptized? Colossians 2:12 says it is symbolic of when Jesus died, was buried in the grave, and then he rose from the dead. When you are baptized and go down into the water, it is a burial....a burial of your old life of sin. Then, when you come up out of the water, you are raised up in a new life...the Christian life. You are forgiven. It is explained that way again in Romans 6:3-4: *...don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Some believe they can be baptized by having water sprinkled on them or poured on them. But think about that. Baptism is a burial. When you bury someone who has died, do you sprinkle a little dirt on them, or do you pour a little dirt on them? No! You completely cover them. That's how baptism is to be performed. When the Bible tells of John baptizing people, it says he was baptizing people at Aenon near Salim because "there was *plenty* of water." (John 3:23) Would he have needed a place where there was *plenty* of water if he were just going to sprinkle or pour water on their heads? No. He could have done that in a house with a bowl or pitcher of water. Also, in Mark 1:9,10 when Jesus, himself, came to be baptized by John, it says, *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* So, if Jesus was coming up out of the water, then he had to have gone down into the water! Therefore, we can conclude that to be baptized you must be submerged under water.

Why must you be baptized? Being baptized is what puts you in contact with the saving blood of Jesus. How precious is that saving blood! But, if we do not accept this great gift, it is like medicine in a bottle. What if you were deathly sick and the doctor gave you medicine to cure you? If you left the medicine in the bottle and never took it, you could die! The medicine would do you no good if it stayed in the bottle. Just the same, the blood of Jesus can't save you unless you come into contact with it through baptism. That's God's grace...united with your faith...demonstrated in obedience!

How can so many believers in Christ stop short of this important step? Some say that they have accepted Jesus as their Savior (they believe), and they feel at that point, that they are saved. What does the Bible say? Mark 16:16 says, *whoever believes AND is baptized will be saved...* Acts 22:16 says that baptism washes away your sins. Also in 1 Peter 3:21-22, the Bible says, *And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body (like when you take a bath), but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at God's right hand.* How could the Scripture be written any clearer than to be specifically stated that baptism saves you?

So, since you come into contact with Jesus' saving blood at baptism, then you must obey God and be baptized. It is a commandment in Acts 2:38: *Repent and be baptized every one of you (that includes me and you!) in the name of Jesus Christ (why?) for the forgiveness of your sins.* Mark 16:15 and 16 says, *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* (Read on. There's more!)

Chapter 7

Examples of People Being Saved

Examples of People Being Saved

To make these steps of salvation clearer (especially about baptism), let's read about some people in the New Testament who wanted to know how to be saved. Pay close attention to what they were told, and to what they actually did.

Acts 2:14-41: 3,000 People are Saved on One Day!

After Jesus died and went back into Heaven, his apostles went around preaching the good news of salvation. One Sunday, at a feast called Pentecost, a crowd of people were gathered in Jerusalem. Just a few weeks earlier, these people, with the help of some evil men, had been a part of the mob that had crucified Jesus. Peter got up and spoke to them. He explained to them from the Old Testament that this Jesus whom they had crucified was no criminal and no ordinary man. He was the Son of God! The people believed what Peter said, and they were cut to the heart. That means they were shocked and sorry. They asked the apostles, "What should we do?" (They knew they were guilty of sin.) Peter replied, *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.'* Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number (became Christians) that day.

Acts 8:9-13: Simon and Others are Saved

Acts 8 tells of a preacher named Philip. He met a man named Simon and preached to him and to others. Philip told them the good news about Jesus. Verses 12 and 13 says, *But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized.*

Acts 8:26-39: An Ethiopian Man is Saved

Another time, this preacher named Philip met an important government official from the country of Ethiopia. The official had been to Jerusalem and was now on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, part of the Old Testament. Philip asked the man, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man answered, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" So Philip climbed up into the chariot with him. Philip explained the words that the man had been reading. The Scriptures he was reading were prophecies about Jesus, and Philip told the man the good news that Jesus had already come to earth and died to save

people from their sins. (So this official heard the Word.) As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the man said "Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized?" Verse 36 says that Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The man answered "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (That was his confession of faith!) And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the man *went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* (Did Philip sprinkle water on him or pour it on him? No. They went down into the water.) Then the man went on his way rejoicing! Why? Because he was saved!

Acts 9:1-19: Saul is Saved (Also found in Acts 22:3-16)

Saul was one of the Jews who disapproved of people becoming Christians. He did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He went around persecuting Christians, putting many of them in prison because they believed in Jesus. One day while he was on his way to the city of Damascus to arrest more Christians, a very bright light shined down on him from Heaven. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul said, "Who are you?" and the voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." Saul got up and found that he was blind. The people with him led him into town. Meanwhile, the Lord appeared to a man named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was afraid of Saul because he had heard about him...how he was arresting Christians and putting them in prison. God told Ananias, *Go! This man is my chosen instrument (helper) to carry my name before the Gentiles (non-Jews) and their kings and the people of Israel (Jews).* Ananias obeyed God, and went to see Saul. He told Saul that God had sent him. He said, *And now what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.* And right then Saul was baptized. From that time on, Saul (whose name was changed to Paul) went from city to city telling the good news of Jesus and baptizing people instead of arresting them!

Acts 10:1-48: Cornelius and His Family are Saved

There was a Roman soldier, a centurion, named Cornelius. He and all his family were sincere about loving God, fearing God, and worshipping God. Cornelius gave generously to people in need. He prayed to God regularly. It appears that Cornelius was already a religious man, doesn't it? But, even though he was a good man and worshipped God, he was not yet saved. How do we know that? Because beginning in verse 4, the Bible says that God heard his prayers and wanted Cornelius to meet the apostle Peter to find out what to do to be saved! Verses 30-33 say that Cornelius did what God said to do, and Peter told Cornelius about Jesus. At first,

only Jews became followers of Christ (Christians). But Cornelius was a Gentile (not born into a Jewish family). God showed Peter that it was okay for Gentiles to be saved, too, because God's plan was to offer salvation to ALL people. Verse 48 says that Peter ORDERED that they (Cornelius and his family) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. So, if Cornelius was already saved just by being good and loving God, why was someone sent to baptize him and his family? Because he wasn't saved, until he was baptized. (Remember that Jesus says salvation happens at baptism! Mark 16:16)

Acts 16:11-15: Lydia and her Family are Saved

A group of women were meeting to worship beside a river. Paul spoke to them about Jesus. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. Verse 15 says "When she and her household were baptized, she invited us to her home." Once again we see that someone who was already a worshipper of God was told to be baptized. Baptism is necessary for salvation!

Acts 16:25-34: The Jailer and his Family are Saved

Paul and his co-worker, Silas, were put in prison because they preached the good news of Jesus. They were severely beaten, put into the inner part of the prison, and their feet were fastened in stocks (so that they couldn't get away). About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs to God. (They had just been beaten! Can you imagine? Would you have been singing?) Suddenly there was an earthquake. All the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up and drew his sword to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights and fell, trembling before Paul and Silas. He asked them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.* (Was that enough? No...read on...) Then they told the jailer and his family the story of Jesus. *At that hour of the night (later than midnight), the jailer took them and washed their wounds (he was sorry...he repented); then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.*

In every instance, those who believed were baptized.

Chapter 8

More Information About Salvation

More Information About Salvation

You just read many examples of people being baptized and becoming Christians. Those people were old enough to hear and understand the good news of Jesus, old enough to believe in Him, old enough to repent of their sins, old enough to confess their faith, and then were baptized. Can a baby or a little child understand fully what Jesus has done for them? Can a baby repent of its sins? No, a baby doesn't know right from wrong yet. Can a baby confess his or her faith in Jesus? No, they are too young to talk like that or to understand what it means! A baby has no need of baptism to save them, because at that point, they are not yet lost. They are not guilty of sin. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus said, *Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.* Some say that children are born with the sins of their father or that they are born guilty of the original sin of Adam (the first man in the Garden of Eden). But that's not what God says. In Ezekiel 18:20, the Bible says, *The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.* So, babies and little children are in a safe state until they grow old enough to understand what sin is, and old enough to understand about faith, repentance, confession and baptism. Once a person reaches that time in his or her life, and is convinced that he is a sinner in need of God, he is ready to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All the steps of salvation are important. You must obey all of the commands that tell how to be saved. One verse says if you believe, you will be saved. Another says if you confess you will be saved. Another says if you repent and are baptized you will be saved. All of these Scriptures put together, plus the examples of the people you just read about, give us a clear picture of what to do to be saved. Ephesians 2:8 says, *For it is by grace (God's kindness) you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves (not because you deserve it), it is the gift of God."* What a wonderful gift!

Hear the Word + Believe in Jesus + Repent of your sins + Confess that Jesus is Lord + Be baptized = SALVATION.

Remember the combination locks that you had on your locker at school or in gym class? Think of using the "formula" for salvation just like using a combination lock. The combination may be to turn the dial right to 25, left to 16, then right again to 31. You know that if you leave out a number, the lock won't open. If you turn the dial to any wrong number, it won't open either. Just the same, if you leave out any part of the plan of salvation, you won't be saved. Or, if you change any part of the plan of salvation, you won't be saved. You must do it God's way only!

Once you have been baptized, your life as a Christian begins. You are born again (John 3:3), starting over as a new person with a clean slate. Romans 6:4 says, *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Baptism washes your sins away, as we've already read in Acts 22:16.

Once you are a Christian, you must continue to obey God by living a faithful Christian life. Read the New Testament every day to find out more about how to live the Christian life. In Revelation 2:10 God says, *Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life (heaven).* Some people think that once they have been saved, they can never be lost again. But be careful...Galatians 5:4 says that a person can fall from grace. That means, if a person turns their back on God and goes back into the world, living a constant, sinful lifestyle again, they can lose their relationship with God. Hebrews 10:26 says, *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire (hell)."* Notice the words: *deliberately keep on sinning.* Again, that means sinning on purpose. No one is perfect and even after baptism, there will be times when you fail and do things that are wrong. That is not deliberately sinning, that is temporary failure. When sin does occur after baptism, the way to keep your relationship right with God is to pray to God for his forgiveness, and to repent (turn away from the sin) and try harder not to do it anymore. 1 John 1:7-9 tells us this: *But if we walk in the light (live as a Christian) as he (Jesus) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins (admit them to God), he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

It is important to know that God gives us the power to overcome temptation. He helps us as we try to live a good, clean life. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Be aware of what your temptations are. (You may never be tempted to shoplift, as some people are, or to murder someone, but you may be tempted to use bad language, or tell lies, etc.) Satan uses your weaknesses against you. Pray and ask God to help you win over Satan. Every day, ask God to forgive you. He's promised He will!

Even a Christian cannot live a perfect, sinless life, but he *can* live a forgiven life because Jesus paid for our sins. See what *power* there is in the cross? Remember this: The Christian lives "in the land of beginning again!"

Chapter 9

The Importance of the Church

The Importance of the Church

When you are baptized into the saving blood of Jesus, you are baptized into the church. Galatians 3:26-27 says, *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* Then Acts 2:47 says, *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* So, the same process that saves you from your sins when you are baptized, automatically adds you to the Lord's church.

A famous singer was once quoted as saying, "I have a very close relationship with God, but I don't do the church thing." How confused she is! You cannot separate being saved and being in the church. The church is not the church building; the church is the people who are saved. When you are saved, you are a member of the Lord's church. Sometimes the church is called the body of Jesus, and Jesus himself is the head of the church. Picture that illustration! Ephesians 3:22 says, *And God placed all things under his (Jesus') feet, and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body.* Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18 also say that Jesus is the head of the church. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that we are baptized into the body, and Galatians 3:27 says that we are baptized into Christ. Being "in Christ" means being a member of his church. Jesus loves his church. He bought and paid for it with his own blood on the cross! (Acts 20:28)

All spiritual blessings are in Christ. Those outside of the body of Christ (outside the church) are not eligible for these spiritual blessings. (Ephesians 1:3) For example, some of the spiritual blessings are: salvation from sin, being part of a family of believers, the power of prayer, the promise of Heaven, and receiving the Holy Spirit to help you.

The word "church" is used in two ways in the New Testament. The first way it is used is to mean the universal church; that is, the whole church that Jesus died for. Remember the church is not the building, it is the people. So, all people who are baptized believers worldwide are *the church*.

The other way the word "church" is used is to mean a local congregation, a group of believers meeting together in a certain town or place. So either way, the church is the body of believers, whether in the sense of ALL baptized believers in the whole world, or in the sense of the local assembly of baptized believers in a town.

Here is an illustration: Everyone is familiar with MacDonald's restaurants. In the universal sense, there is the multi-million dollar company, which we call MacDonald's. Someone might say "I bought stock in MacDonald's," meaning the company. Then there are the local restaurants in cities and towns, which we also call MacDonald's. "Let's go to MacDonald's for lunch" means the local restaurant.

Now here are two examples of how the word *church* is used in the Bible: In the universal sense, Ephesians 5:23 says, *...Christ is the head of the church (all the saved, world-wide), his body, of which he is the Savior.* In the local sense, look at the first 2 verses of the book of Philemon. That book is a letter that Paul wrote to a man named Philemon, and he starts with this greeting: *To Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker... and to the church that meets in your home.* You see, that letter was addressed to a local group of Christians.

The Bible tells us that there is to be only one church (world-wide), the church that is in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:4-6 says, *There is one body (the church) and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* Colossians 1:18 says, *And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church. So, local congregations of the church are not different denominations. They should be alike...as long as they are practicing Christianity according to the New Testament.*

You might ask, "Why then are there so many different *kinds* of churches?" Actually, you mean why are there so many denominations (Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Disciples of Christ, Jehovah's witness, Mormon, Assemblies of God, Nazarenes, Episcopal, Presbyterian, etc. etc.)? The word *denomination* means division. Just like a *denominator* in a fraction (the bottom number) is the number that you divide by. $\frac{3}{4}$ means 3 divided by 4. So, if there is only one church, according to Ephesians 4, why are there so many *denominations* (divisions)?

The answer is that people base their religion on different things. For instance, some people believe they must obey *both* the Old and New Testament. However, the Old Testament is the law of Moses. It was written for the Jews. It was replaced by the new law of Christ when Jesus died on the cross. The laws of the Old Testament applied to the people living under that law at that time. But, since we are now living in the Christian age, we are not bound to the old law anymore.

Here's an illustration: People of the United States have lived under three different laws. At first, American colonists were under British rule and had to obey their laws. Then we fought a war and gained our independence from Britain, and lived under a set of laws called the Articles of Confederation. Years later, those laws were replaced by the Constitution. That is the law we are still under today as Americans. Wouldn't it be silly to obey the British laws of the 1600's today? Do you pay taxes to Great Britain? Of course not! We aren't under that law anymore! What if you refused to get a driver's license today because under the Articles of Confederation no one had to? How silly! There wasn't a law about driver's licenses then because there were no cars! See, the laws of that day are dead. They don't apply to us anymore. We must obey only the laws of the Constitution!

Well, in the Bible, there were also three periods of time when the people were under 3 different laws. During Adam and Noah and Abraham's time, they were under what is called the Patriarchal law. Patriarchs were the fathers, the head of the families. Each head of the family was the religious leader. However, another law and another form of worship came about in Moses' time. It was the 10 Commandments and the other laws that are found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. All Jews lived under that law. Even hundreds of years later, Jesus, who was a Jew, lived under Moses' law. However, Jesus was teaching, while he was living on the earth, that the law was about to change. God is the only one who can change God's laws, and God did give Jesus, his Son, authority to change it (Matthew 28:18). That was Jesus' mission on earth. So the Law did change when Jesus died on the cross. At that point, a person no longer had to be a Jew to be one of God's chosen, saved people. A person only had to become a Christian (follower of Christ), and anyone, whether he was born a Jew or Gentile, could become a Christian (Galatians 3:28). The new law, the law of Christ, is still in effect today until Jesus comes again. So we are now living under the Law of Christ...right now, today.

So why do some people teach that we must obey the Old Testament, the Law of Moses, given to the Jews? That law is no longer binding. Colossians 2:13-14 says, *When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive in Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations (laws), that was against us and opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.* Romans 7:6 says, *But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law (the law of Moses) so that we serve in a new way of the Spirit, and not in the old*

way of the written code (Old Testament). Hebrews 8:7 says, For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. Verse 13 says, By calling this covenant (testament) new, he has made the old one obsolete.

So, should anyone base their religious practices on the Old Testament? No, but many do. Some mix the Old Testament way of worship with the New Testament way. For example, the Law of Moses commanded that worship be conducted by priests. However, when the New Law began at the cross, that changed. Burning incense, tithing, instrumental music in worship, having an altar...all these are commands of worship in the Old Testament but not in the New. Another example of this is keeping the Sabbath (worshipping on Saturday instead of Sunday). That was the day of worship under Moses' law, but the Christians in the New Testament worshipped on the first day of the week (Sunday). (Acts 20:7)

Another reason there are so many denominations is because some people base their beliefs on what men say, even if it is different from the Bible. Sometimes groups of men (leaders meeting in a council) vote on doctrine and make laws for people of their religion. Some teachings that start out as men's opinions become traditions handed down over the years. Then people who don't read the Bible obey these man-made laws, thinking they are obeying God's laws! Another danger is that many people blindly follow leaders who are false teachers. They think that surely these religious men know the Bible and are telling it to them correctly, but that is where the real danger comes in! Every person must learn the truth by reading the Bible himself. You can't get into heaven based on who your preacher is or who your parents are. Each person is responsible for his own salvation. The excuse that you were lead astray by a false teacher will not excuse you on the Judgment Day! Romans 14:10-12 says, *For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to God.'* So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Remember that we must always base our religious practices ONLY on what God tells us to do, not what man says. What does the Bible say about this? Revelation 22:18, 19 says, *I warn everyone who hears the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life (heaven).*

Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 7:6-8: *He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:*

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. Jesus clearly stated here that we must follow God's Word not man's. It doesn't matter what any man or council or church board decides is right...it only matters what God says in the Bible.

In Galatians 1:6-8, Paul was writing to some Christians in Galatia, and he wrote: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert (change, distort) the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*

We are to follow only the teachings in the New Testament. The Bible clearly says that not everyone will be saved...there will even be religious people who are lost because they did not do things God's way. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, *Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

How do men dare to change God's Word? And, why would anyone think they can improve on God's plan? Because of the warnings clearly stated in the New Testament, we must be very careful to follow ONLY God's Word in deciding how we worship and how we become saved.

If every person and every church followed ONLY the New Testament, and nothing else, there would be unity! Think about this: When you plant corn seeds, what you get is corn. Not tomatoes. Not apples. Just corn. In the same way, if you plant the seed of the Word of God, and nothing more or nothing less, it will produce the same results anywhere at any time: The New Testament Church!

How can you know for sure if you are worshipping in the correct church? Consider every act of worship, where the doctrine or "creed" comes from, the name of the church, how to correctly select rulers of the church, how to become a member, and what the mission of the church is. Then, compare the practices of the church

where you attend with the New Testament church. As we have stated earlier, there will be religious people who are lost (Matthew 7:21-23), so you must be very careful to worship God's way, not man's way. The next section will explain this further.

Chapter 10

How to Find the New Testament Church Today

How to Find the New Testament Church Today

A dressmaker uses a pattern to cut fabric to exact specifications so that when she sews the pieces together, the garment will fit properly. An architect draws a blueprint (a pattern) by which the construction workers build a house. If the construction workers do not strictly go by the pattern, the house will not turn out right.

We must view the New Testament as a strict pattern of how to worship and how to live the Christian life. To do this, one must understand the law of exclusion. That means that one should respect the silence of the Scriptures as well as the commandments. For example, if I gave you a recipe for oatmeal cookies, it would say to put in so much oatmeal, so much sugar, so much flour, etc. etc. But, I would not have to write on the card "And don't put in any bacon...and don't put in any pickles...and don't put in any hot peppers...and don't put in any ketchup," and so on and so on. I wouldn't have to list everything NOT to put in the cookies, because the recipe (the pattern) would tell you what TO put in. That excludes everything else! Doesn't that make sense?

In just the same way, if we learn to do just what God tells us TO DO, we will not need for him to list all the things NOT to do. The silence of Scripture is to be respected. God gave Noah specific instructions (a pattern) of how to build the ark. Noah obeyed (Gen. 6:13-16). God also gave Moses specific instructions (a pattern) for the building of the Tabernacle (the movable building in which the Israelites worshipped). Moses obeyed.

Paul wrote to a young preacher named Timothy and said, *What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.* 1 Corinthians 4:6 tells us, *Do not go beyond what is written.*

The Bible is our instruction manual. What would happen if the workers on the assembly line in an airplane factory did not follow the instructions? Would you want to fly on that plane?

The Bible is our guide. You use a map to find the right way to go on a long trip. God's Word is our map to heaven, but we must follow it exactly!

Reading the Bible makes us spiritually healthy. What if a pharmacist did not exactly follow the doctor's instructions when you went to get your prescriptions filled? Would you feel safe taking those medications?

We must NOT depart from the pattern of the New Testament. Revelation 22:18-19 says, *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

Once again, consider what is written in Galatians 1:6-8: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* In verses 11 and 12, Paul goes on to say, *I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

So, if we are to follow the pattern of the New Testament church, then let's find out what that pattern is! Read on...

1. How Did the New Testament Church Choose its Leaders?

We have already learned in a previous section that Jesus is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22-23).

Each local congregation of the church is to have elders (Acts 20:17). Elders are also called shepherds or overseers (Acts 20:28). Sometimes, in the King James Version and the American Standard Version, the word is translated as "bishops." All these names refer to the same group of leaders, the elders. Elders "direct the affairs of the church" (1 Timothy 5:17).

How does a congregation decide who its elders will be? Again, the pattern is in the New Testament. 1 Timothy 3:2-7 says, *Now the overseer must be above reproach (not infallible which is impossible, but consistently living the Christian life), the*

husband of but one wife (so an elder MUST be a man, not a woman), *temperate* (moderate in all he does, not living in extremes), *self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money* (not greedy). *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert* (a new Christian), *or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil* (doomed to Hell). *He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.* Paul also told Titus to appoint elders in every town and then lists the qualifications again (Titus 1:5-9).

Elders only have rule over their own congregation, not over many congregations. In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter writing a letter to Christians, speaks to "the elders among you" and encourages them to "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care." Then he reminds them in verse 4 that Jesus (not Peter, or any other man) is the Chief Shepherd (the ONLY head of the church). (See also John 10:14-16 where Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd and there is only one.) So there is to be no "head elder" or any man exalted above the other elders. All rule together equally. Each congregation of the church is to have its own eldership. Each congregation is to be self-governing. The "headquarters" of the church is in Heaven only, not anywhere on earth. The New Testament does not authorize a centralized government over all the churches. In Philippians 1:1, Paul and Timothy write to *all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi (a local congregation in a town), together with the overseers (elders) and deacons.*

That brings us to a discussion of deacons. The word deacon means "servant." Deacons work under the direction of the elders. Their job is to be of service to the church. Acts 6:1-5 tells of seven men chosen to help feed the widows so that the elders could be about more spiritual matters. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 gives the qualifications of deacons. A deacon must be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. Each deacon must be the husband of one wife (so then a deacon must be a man, not a woman), and his wife must not be a malicious talker, but temperate (doesn't do things to excess), trustworthy, and worthy of respect. The deacon must manage his children well. Deacons must first be tested, then if there is nothing against them, they may serve as deacons.

2. By What Name Was the New Testament Church Known?

Because there was only ONE church during the time of the New Testament, the church was most often referred to simply as "the church." Acts 8:1 says a great persecution broke out against "the church." Acts 9:31 says, *The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.*

And there are many other references like those. In Romans 16:16 the local congregations are known as the "churches of Christ." The letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians begins with the greeting, *To the church of God in Corinth* (1 Corinthians 1:2). In Hebrews 12:23 the church is referred to as "the church of the firstborn." (The firstborn is Jesus, God's first and only Son.) All of those names are authorized in Scripture.

Individual members of the church were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Sometimes they were referred to as "disciples" (Acts 14:21, 22).

Some may ask "What difference does it make to call a church by one name or another?" Remember, we are trying to follow the pattern set in the New Testament. The name "church of Christ" honors Christ only, not any other human founder. Christ is the head of the church, and the name given in Scripture honors him as such. This promotes unity throughout the churches. Using the name of men creates division. For example, read what is said about this in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13: *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloes' household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas' (Peter); still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? See? Division is wrong. Using the name of Christ, the head of the church, to identify the church creates unity.*

3. What is the Church's Creed?

A creed is "a formal summary of religious beliefs; an authoritative statement of doctrine..." In other words, it is the code of rules and standards by which the

church is run. Well, once again, let's look at the pattern laid out for us in the New Testament. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* In 2 Peter 1:3 we read, *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (living like God) through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."* From those Scriptures, we can conclude that God has provided us with everything we need to know by giving us the Bible. The Bible, therefore, is our only creed. Any laws or demands added by men are not approved by God. 2 Timothy 4:3 warns us of this: *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* Mark 7:6 and the verses following are another warning: *These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men... Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down...(verse 13).* So, we must conclude that no laws or rules made by man are to be the creed of the church. Instead, the Word of God (the Bible) is our only creed.

4. How Does a Person Become a Member of the Church?

We have discussed in an earlier section, that you must have faith in Jesus (Heb. 11:6), repent of your sins (Acts 2:38), confess Jesus as your Savior (Romans 10:9-10) and be baptized (immersed in water) to wash away your sins (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16). At the point of baptism, a person is added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). There is no authority in Scripture for the church or any church leaders to vote on a person's right to be in the church or not. According to the New Testament pattern, a person was automatically added to the church (the saved) when they were baptized.

5. What is the Purpose of the Church?

- Evangelism—Ephesians 3:10-11 says, *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..."*
- Benevolence--Galatians 6:10 says, *Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* James 1:27 says, *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is*

this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- Edification—Ephesians 4:16 says, *From him (Jesus) the whole body (the church), joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

So we can see that the task or work of the New Testament church was (1) to spread the Word of God to others, (2) to help the needy, and (3) to edify (build up in love) each of its members.

6. How Are We to Worship?

What does the New Testament say about how we are to worship? Jesus said in John 4:23-24, *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship him in spirit (with the right attitude) and in truth (the right way).* Remember Cornelius? He was the Roman centurion in Acts 10? He had the right spirit because he feared God, prayed regularly, and gave to those in need, but he didn't have the truth. He didn't know about salvation through Jesus and the need for baptism, so Peter taught him. Now consider the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They were very religious and studied the Old Law carefully and they even knew that Jesus claimed to be the Savior and Son of God. But their worship was in vain because they did not have the right spirit or attitude (Matt. 15:1-9). They had no faith in Jesus to forgive sins. They depended on man-made traditions in their worship. So we can see that a true worshipper must have the correct attitude (spirit) and also worship in the right way (truth).

The pattern of New Testament worship is described in Scripture:

- Teaching and preaching

Acts 2:42 tells of the early church who *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper) and to prayer.* We read in Matthew 28:19-20 that Jesus told his disciples to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...* Also Acts 20:7 tells us that on the first day of the week (Sunday) Paul met with the believers and preached to them.

- Praying

Prayer is the way we talk to God. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. Read that prayer in your Bible. (Understand though, that Jesus told his disciples to pray "thy kingdom come" because it had not come at that time. It has come now. So we don't need to ask for that anymore. Jesus' kingdom is the church, which was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.) Acts 2:42 (above, in #1) listed prayer as an act of worship. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, *Pray continually*. Paul wrote to Timothy, a fellow preacher, about the need for prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1-5. He says, *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*

Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, said, *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints*. So prayer must be done in reverence (with respect) for God, and it must be from the heart, and it must be offered in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

- Giving

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 sets the example (pattern) of giving for us today: *Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week (every Sunday), each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made*. In the Old Testament, the Jews were under the Law of Moses. That law commanded that they tithe, or give a tenth of their income (money, crops, etc.) to the Lord. We are not under that law. Remember we studied that the old law has been replaced by the new covenant (New Testament), which is the law of Christ. So, how much should you give? 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*.

- Observing the Lord's Supper

In the United States, we celebrate Memorial Day in May. That special day is set aside to honor any and all soldiers who gave their lives for our freedom. In a way, that is like the Lord's Supper. It is a special time set aside to honor Jesus for giving his life on the cross to pay for our freedom—freedom from punishment for our sins. What is the pattern set up in the New Testament for this special ceremony called the Lord's Supper, or sometimes called Communion? Once again, you can read Acts 2:42 quoted in #1 above. One of the acts of worship listed there was the breaking of bread, which is the Lord's Supper. Acts 20:6-7 tells us this was done by the early church on the first day of the week (Sunday). It says, *On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.*

There are four places where you can read about the purpose of the Lord's Supper. Three of them are Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:14-20. The fourth one is in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 in which Paul says, *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

The Lord's Supper is given in two parts. First the unleavened bread is passed to you. It represents the body of Jesus, which hung on the cross. The bread is unleavened (containing no yeast, like "matzo" crackers) because this was the Passover supper that Jesus was eating with his disciples and only unleavened bread (made without yeast) was served during Passover. Remember Jesus still lived under Jewish law and so to observe the Passover was the right thing for him to do at that time. We do not observe the Passover today because it is a part of the Old Law, not the New Law of Christ under which we now live. The New Law began at the cross. So instead, we observe the Lord's Supper.

Now, the second part is the "fruit of the vine" (grape juice, or wine) which represents the blood that Jesus shed on the cross to pay for our sins. As we partake of each of these, we are to remember what they represent, honoring Jesus for his great sacrifice of love.

- Singing

Another act of worship in which the New Testament church participated was singing. Singing is a way of praising God. In all the Bible verses quoted below, notice that only vocal music (singing) is commanded. Singing accompanied by instruments of music (pianos, organs, guitars, horns, etc.) is never mentioned in the New Testament. (Instruments of music were used in worship in the Old Testament, but remember that is a dead law. We are now under the New Law only.) So let's see what the pattern for singing in worship was in the church of the first century.

Ephesians 5:19 says, *Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Colossians 3:16 says, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

1 Corinthians 14:15 says, *So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.*

James 5:13 says, *Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.*

Some might say that if instrumental music is not forbidden, then it is allowed. However, there is a "law of exclusion" applied here. Just like with the Lord's Supper, the Bible does not say "and don't serve potatoes, and don't serve cake, and don't serve lamb chops, and don't serve bananas." It is not necessary to list all the things NOT to have, when what God expects us to have is clearly stated: the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. In this same way, the Bible does not need to say, "and do not use a piano, and do not use a guitar, and do not use an organ, and do not use drums" because what we are supposed to do is clearly stated: Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord. If the command was generic (all-inclusive and general, not specific), that is, if the command was only to make music, and that was all that was said, then any kind of music would be okay. However, the command is not generic, it is specific (exact); and that is, to sing.

Remember in each act of worship and in every aspect of the church it is a **MUST** to always follow the pattern that God gave us. No one has authority to change God's laws. Do you love God? 1 John 5:3 says, *This is love for God: to obey his commands.*

Conclusion

You have learned who *God* is. You have learned about his Son, *Jesus*. You know "the big picture" of what the Bible is about. And, now you know what *God* expects you to do with this information. Think about these things. Pray about them. Ask *God* to help you have the courage to do what is right. Honor *God* and honor *Jesus'* sacrifice on the cross by accepting his wonderful gift of salvation! And do it *God's* way, according to the pattern laid out in the New Testament. It is the most important thing you will ever do. It will make you feel wonderful! It will completely change your life.....and your ETERNAL life will be in HEAVEN!

God bless you!

