



## Is Following Christ the Same as Following Christianity? (Part I)

**1 Corinthians 4:16-17:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>*Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.*  
<sup>17</sup>*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*



When someone says they are a Christian, their claim can be easily interpreted in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, following the name of Christ has been a dramatically devalued description of religion over many centuries. Think back to the Dark Ages when the church, for the sake of “saving souls” in the name of Christ, mercilessly hunted, tortured and killed those they determined to be non-believers. Think about the smorgasbord of choices one now has available. We can choose a brand of Christianity that suits our lifestyle and fulfills our preferences. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ was not always this way. In the time of Jesus and the apostles, it meant something higher and had an eternal purpose. The question we all need to ask ourselves is simple: is my chosen brand of Christianity in complete accord with Jesus’ original teachings?

We are dropping in on specific teachings of Jesus and asking how churches in general apply these teachings. We are big supporters of topical Bible study and are not looking to “cherry pick” scriptures to fit a specific theology. We have scripturally explored all of these topics in depth in other podcast episodes, but here we are looking at the words of Jesus and the apostles as a high-level overview.



Again, our main question to consider on all of these points will be:

*Is following Christ the same as following Christianity?*

Let’s begin by looking at some of Jesus’ teachings on life and death:

**John 5:25-29:** (NASB) <sup>25</sup>*Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead <3498> will hear the voice of the son of God, and those who hear will live.*



What did Jesus mean by saying those who are dead will hear his voice? If they are dead, how can they hear?

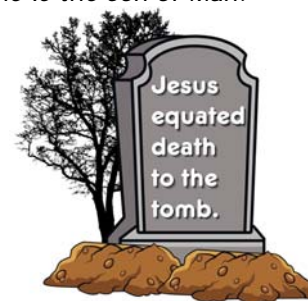


The context defines it for us:

<sup>26</sup>*For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the son also to have life in himself;* <sup>27</sup>*and He gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.*

<sup>28</sup>*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice,* <sup>29</sup>*and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*

Based on this, Jesus clearly equates death to the tomb (or grave depending on the translation). The dead hear the voice of Jesus because they are awakened. What does the Greek word *dead* here mean?



**Death:** Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #3498 *nekros*; (a corpse); dead (literally or figuratively; also as noun)



Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon includes: one that has breathed his last, lifeless; spiritually dead; destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God, because given up to trespasses and sins; inactive as respects doing right; 2b) destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative

While this word primarily does mean dead, as in lifeless, it can be used figuratively as well:

**Figurative**

Luke 9:60: (KJV) *Jesus said unto him, Let the **dead** <3498> bury their **dead** <3498>: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

*Let the dead* (even the living are figuratively dead, undergoing the dying process) *bury the physically dead.*

**Literal**

John 20:9: (KJV) *For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the **dead** <3498>.*

Here, *dead* is literal.

In the figurative example, humans are figuratively dead because we are all dying in Adam.

John 20:9 refers to the literal death of Jesus. Even without any more scriptural support than this verse, Jesus seems to be teaching that those who have died are NOT disembodied, conscious souls floating about in some other location.

This IS what the Bible teaches. Jesus is NOT saying we have an immortal soul life - he is talking about something different. How do we know he is talking about actual death and lifelessness?

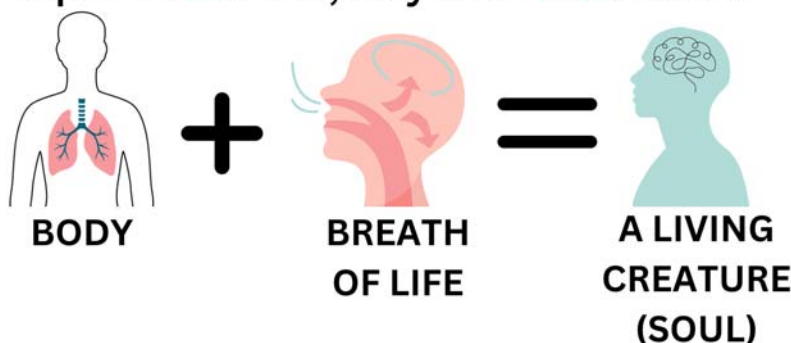
The Old Testament teaches that human life was created in God's image, and man became a living soul/being:

Genesis 2:7: (NASB) *Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living **being** <5315>.*

**Soul/being**: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5315 *nephesh*; properly, a breathing creature

We are given a straightforward equation first thing in Genesis:

A person **IS** a soul; they don't **HAVE** a soul.



Does this refer only to humans?



No. Humans AND animals are ALL referred to as *souls* (*nephesh*) creatures. In the Old Testament, the same Hebrew word is used to describe both animals and humans as souls.





Genesis 1:20-21: (KJV) <sup>20</sup>And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly *the moving creature <5315>* (this is the same word for soul) that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. <sup>21</sup>And God created great whales, and every living *creature <5315>* that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Looking at a scripture like this which very casually and comfortably uses the exact same word to define a “human being” and an “animal being,” we can say there is an equality in the fact that they are both “beings.”



*Soul and creature: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5315 nephesh; a breathing creature.*

Grasping this simple and original understanding of what we are as human beings will help us see that the teachings of Jesus exactly reflected God's original purpose and design.

Everything we believe should reflect God's original purpose and design. At no time did Jesus contradict God.

Genesis 2:15-17: (NASB) <sup>15</sup>Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>The LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup>but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

God told Adam *you will surely die*. Satan told Eve she would not really die in Genesis 3:4. Whom are we going to believe? God who cannot lie (Hebrew 6:18), or Satan, the *father of lies* (John 8:44)? The dying process began at the time of the sin.

2 Peter 3:8 tells us *a day with the Lord is as a thousand years*. Adam and Eve died with the thousand year “day.” After death they were no longer a soul, a being.



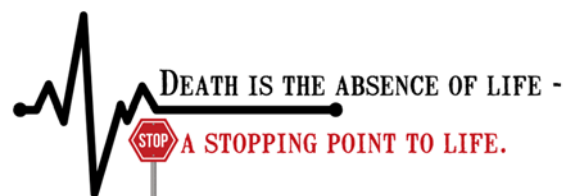
But what exactly is death? Clearly Satan lied because we see death all around us. But is it just a gateway to another plane of existence? Is death for just an instant, and after we pass through it, are we really even more alive than before floating around in some other place?



*For in the day (not a 24-hour day) that you eat from it you will surely die* - this does not say “you will surely go through the gateway of death to some other kind of existence.” It says you will die. It is a stopping point to life - not a gateway to anything more. It is an absolute final destination. We say final because when God explained the consequence to Adam, there was no provision for anything beyond death. You will die; end of story.



Jesus taught exactly what Genesis taught, that death is the absence of life. We know the ransom and resurrection fill out the rest of this story, but at this stage in a human life, dying means a stopping point to life.



**This teaching about death being a final destination was clearly repeated throughout the New Testament:**

**Romans 6:22-23:** (NASB) *<sup>22</sup>But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*For the wages of sin is death* - unearthing an old skeleton proves our bodies die and stay dead. But humankind has somehow recalibrated death as an instant gateway for a part of who we are - our soul or spirit - to physically be somewhere else in the afterlife. We literally hear of the “pearly gates” of heaven.



At Christian Questions, we DO believe in heaven as a destination. How does that work if death is the cessation of our existence and we, as a living soul, die?



As we read in John 5:25-29, we are called from death, the state of non-existence, to life in heaven if we are true followers of Christ and begotten of God’s spirit. Again, death is not a gateway to continued life; it is a destination. Jesus, having paid the ransom for Adam, created an opportunity for another destination after death. Jesus is the sole reason why we get called out of non-existence to life.

A new provision opened. It does not change the meaning or reality of death. It simply means that God’s plan provides another step because Jesus died for the sins that caused Adam’s death. Jesus’ death gives new life where there was none. What a miracle!



**1 Corinthians 15:21-23:** (NASB) *<sup>21</sup>For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at his coming.*

Here again we see this new provision being laid out - *as in Adam all die*. It does NOT say they all come to some gateway because as in Christ they will all be made alive. This tells us that death was and is an absolute destination.

But Jesus says: “Wait! There is another destination. I can bring you back to life through God’s power and God’s plan.”

It is thrilling to see that death is the cessation of life, but God’s plan provides for it to be a temporary condition and only because of Jesus.

Are we going to believe God who cannot lie? Or are we going to believe Satan, the *father of lies*? Are we going to believe that when a man dies, he is not actually dead?



## ARE MY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS GOD-DRIVEN OR MAN-MADE?



The simple but profound defining of the nature of man is consistent throughout all the Bible. Jesus simply reiterated what God had put in place. In so doing, he assured us that he did, in fact, come to save every man, woman and child from death in Adam.

AM I WILLING TO EMBRACE THIS SIMPLE TRUTH, EVEN IF IT  
MEANS I MUST LET GO OF A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE?



Will we embrace this simple truth, even if it is going to cost us something we have been comfortable with for a long time?

The words of Jesus can be much more easily understood if we accept them within the context of scripture and scripture only.

**Christians differ greatly regarding what Christianity will cost us versus the abundance it gives us. Who is right?**

This point can easily be a major bone of contention, as the question is plainly about what we get as Christians. If we honestly look at the words of Jesus, they give us a straightforward answer. Yes, we will be on the receiving end of many good things, but these good things are very different from the good things we had previously expected.



**Is following Christ the same as following Christianity?**

We are looking at the so-called "Prosperity Gospel" here, where people equate faith and having the holy spirit with physical wealth and health.

As we look at Jesus revealing himself as the Messiah, we observe something curious.

**Often, when he shows something good, he also reveals its price as well:**

Luke 9:18-23: (NASB) <sup>18</sup>And it happened that while he was praying alone, the disciples were with him, and he questioned them, saying, *Who do the people say that I am?* <sup>19</sup>They answered and said, *John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.* <sup>20</sup>And he said to them, *But who do you say that I am?* And Peter answered and said, *The Christ of God.*

This was a remarkable revealing of what every faithful Jew awaited for generations. This was the big thing, the waiting for the Messiah. Why? Because Messiah was the deliverer.



It was taking you out of the difficulty you were in because you could be with the deliverer. This was the equivalent in those days of winning the lottery, but even better because it not only would deliver them personally but would deliver all those around them. Jesus revealed as *The Christ of God* was a wonderful, almost unbelievable announcement right before them.



### Here is Jesus' reaction to Peter's answer:

<sup>21</sup>But he warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, <sup>22</sup>saying, *The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.*

Think about how radical and confusing this would have been for the disciples. The Jewish people had been waiting thousands of years in expectation of the Messiah to lead them. The promised Messiah finally came in their lifetime! They would have thought, "Surely, he will lead us out from under this Roman domination and we will all be victorious! Wait, what do you mean you are going to suffer and be killed?!? You are supposed to save us and save us now!"

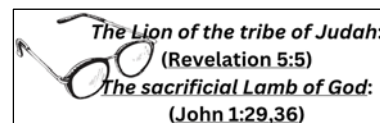
This was not a time for celebration; this was the time to pay the ransom price.

### The price of Messiahship that Jesus revealed was enormous and unexpected:

<sup>23</sup>And he was saying to them all, *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

"Wait, what? You're the Messiah who is going to suffer and die, but now WE have to take up OUR cross and suffer and die with you? What is wrong with this picture? The Messiah was supposed to bring abundance for us!"

They did not understand that before Jesus would come as the victorious Lion of the tribe of Judah, he first had to come as the sacrificial Lamb of God.



**What's wrong with this picture?**

Everything they knew about Messiah was good and wonderful, full of deliverance, happiness and healing. But Jesus is telling them that while this is true, it is not going to happen immediately - there is a process. When Jesus reveals that yes, he is indeed the Messiah, he says, but do not tell anybody because there is a lot of suffering that comes about at the very beginning.

This is the comparison between Jewish expectation and spiritual reality. Everything is not revealed. As Jesus fills in the details, they must have been wondering, *what is going on with this?* Jesus taught it is not the immediate gratification and blessing they thought it would be.

In the midst of his preaching and healing, Jesus gently but firmly reminds a scribe who proclaims a willingness to follow him just how uncomfortable it can be. You would think that if a scribe came up saying, *Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go*, Jesus would lay out the red carpet and make the path sound as enticing as possible.

### Here is what Jesus says:

Matthew 8:18-20: (NASB) <sup>18</sup>Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. <sup>19</sup>Then a scribe came and said to him, *Teacher, I will follow*



*you wherever you go. <sup>20</sup>Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*

This is not a good sales pitch! We still do not see any indication of abundance here. At this point, Jesus does not even have a place to sleep or a place to call home! Following him may not be the life of ease we thought it would be.

Jesus was about the accomplishment of God's will in God's time. He would tell them about the positive side of discipleship, but he would add the price because he was honest and had the integrity of fulfilling God's will in its entirety.

Jesus had much more to say about the cost of following him.

**This next text is after Jesus had spoken with the rich young ruler who went away sorrowfully because he was attached to his wealth:**

**Mark 10:23-27:** (NASB) <sup>23</sup>And Jesus, looking around, said to his disciples, *How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!* <sup>24</sup>The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, *Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!* <sup>25</sup>*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.* <sup>26</sup>*They were even more astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved?* <sup>27</sup>*Looking at them, Jesus said, With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.*



By Jewish standards, we would think this young man would have been at the top of the food chain in Jesus' new way. He was apparently blessed by God because he had wealth, he was young and successfully employed others. Today he would be called an "influencer" with a lot of followers - and here he was, sincere and ready to follow Jesus. In the Old Testament, Israel as a physical nation was promised physical blessings. Obey God and you will be physically blessed with land, family and prosperity. This was a reasonable expectation for the Jews to think God's blessings would continue in this way.

This conclusion Jesus drew was likely very bewildering for his followers, as God had said from the very beginning of the Jewish nation that *Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store, if they were faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 28:5)*. This new way would have been confusing.

Could we possibly fall into the same trap of expectations versus what Jesus is teaching us?



Jesus was saying that following him would be different, higher and costlier. The heavenly reward is the most phenomenal thing we could imagine. Has our church been teaching the sacrificial life of discipleship, in harmony with the words of Jesus?



Again, from a Jewish mind's expectation in that time, we can understand why the disciples would think Jesus' response to the young man did not make sense.

Peter next speaks up to say he is confused and needs to understand because everyone is wondering. Jesus gives an answer that is somewhat comforting yet still confusing.

**Jesus' answer here is often and easily taken out of context. These are the verses right after the account of the rich young ruler:**

**Mark 10:28-30:** (NASB) <sup>28</sup>*Peter began to say to him, Behold, we have left everything and followed you. <sup>29</sup>Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, <sup>30</sup>but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.*

Finally! Here comes the abundance for the followers of Jesus - we get 100 times more *in the present age* - houses and family and land! There is no dispute, as we have direct confirmation from the Apostle Peter, right?

But it comes along with *persecutions*! (And with wealth!)

Let's put this in order so we can understand the import of what Jesus is actually teaching us here. The rich young ruler who followed the Law could not part with his riches and walked away from Jesus.

Is Jesus saying the poor would become rich? No. The rich young man was already rich and was faithfully following the Law. That is why Jesus loved him! Jesus is saying what we physically are willing to leave behind will be replaced with the same kind of advantage but this time on a spiritual level.

What did he mean by this? Let's look at this from a spiritual perspective to understand the spiritual application.

Jesus promised his followers would receive *a hundred times as much now in the present age* of the following:



**HOUSES:** How many homes did the apostles and disciples stay in while spreading the gospel and how many did they actually own?

We do not read a word about any of the apostles owning multiple pieces of real estate.



If the followers of Jesus were supposed to get all those houses, we would think Peter, Andrew, James, John, Phillip and Bartholomew and the rest of the apostles would be the ones leading the way, but none of them received such wealth from the gospel.

Either Jesus lied by promising they would get all of this stuff, OR he meant it in a spiritual sense.



Jesus meant this in a spiritual sense, as in, "What you will receive in terms of homes is a wonderful welcome in many places in different countries by the body of Christ."



**FAMILY:** How broad does the family of every dedicated disciple of Christ become?

It is a "family" - not necessarily children, but it IS a family as the body of Christ. Wherever they went, they had that sense of being part of the same family as those they visited. Regardless if they were in Thessalonica or in Jerusalem, they were among the followers of Christ.



Julie and Jonathan, I know that when you travel and visit your brethren in Christ, you are welcome in their homes. They treat you like family! That is exactly what Jesus is saying. There is a spiritual family unit that is a hundred times bigger than what you had before.



Jesus was not talking about a physical family; he was talking about a spiritual family.



**FARMS:** How many places of growth, development and nourishment did the disciples of Jesus then have?

We do not read about the apostles having hundreds of acres of land that they received because they were followers of Jesus. We read about the cultivation of the word of God through them and with them. Like the Apostle Paul, they went from place to place and set up churches, places of development and nourishment.



This is what Jesus is talking about - the growth of the actual, true discipleship of Christ.



**PERSECUTIONS:** What true Christian does not pay a price for these spiritual blessings?

Jesus always tells us about the beauty, but there is always a price. But this sacrifice is how spirituality develops. Compare the life of Jesus and the apostles with ourselves.

Let's summarize:



- We do not leave our house and get it replaced with a bigger house; we get it replaced with a household of faith.
- We do not leave our family and get new kids; we get a much larger brotherhood, and so on.
- Everything promised was a spiritual promise!



What does history tell us about how the apostles ended up? They were hunted down and killed for the most part. They were not at the top of society.



What did they have? They had the message of good news for all people and an amazing support group of a family in Christ. They got exactly what Jesus said they would get - spiritual blessings with persecutions.

This is why we need to look at the Scriptures and understand the importance of Jesus' teachings. It is beautiful to be his follower, but it was not what everyone in his day expected.

The very next event recorded in Mark added to the sobriety of what following Jesus really meant:

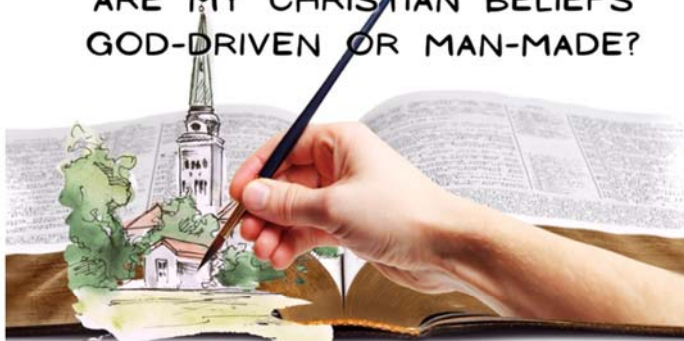
**Mark 10:32-34:** (NASB) <sup>32</sup>*They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again he took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to him, <sup>33</sup>saying, Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles. <sup>34</sup>They will mock him and spit on him, and scourge him and kill him, and three days later he will rise again.*

Jesus surely is not telling his apostles they are going to need a team of real estate agents and bankers to handle all their new-found wealth! To say the gospel promises physical abundance for faithful followers misrepresents what Jesus actually said. The Christian is again and again promised SPIRITUAL REWARDS, not earthly gain. Please do not fall for this! The only ones getting rich are the preachers asking for your money!



The spiritual blessing far outweighs the physical. It is eternal and heavenly. There is no comparison between the physical and heavenly rewards.

ARE MY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS  
GOD-DRIVEN OR MAN-MADE?



The idea that true Christianity is about a life of physical abundance is an idea that is founded on scriptural misinterpretation with a likely dose of wishful thinking. The whole point of discipleship is to follow Jesus who lived nowhere and had nothing and only focused on the fulfilling of God's will.

AM I WILLING TO EMBRACE THIS SIMPLE TRUTH, EVEN IF IT MEANS  
I MUST LET GO OF A MORE COMFORTABLE PERSPECTIVE?



Even though it is humanly uncomfortable, following Jesus does bring us spirituality and blessings that are nowhere else possible!



**With basic biblical doctrine and a sacrificial life in place, what else should a true disciple of Jesus strictly adhere to?**



Our next consideration regarding the teachings of Jesus will focus on the reverent mentality required to keep the true church in an attitude of sound spirituality. In Jesus' time, it was easy for the Pharisees to let things slip into a complacent and self-serving pattern. Jesus' response to this teaches us what not to do! We do not want to copy the actions of the Pharisees.

**Is following Christ the same as following Christianity?**

It seems like some of Christianity today is more focused on social and political aspects, and a "feel good" message. Is that what Jesus taught?

**Jesus stood for godly righteousness and never anything less. This became apparent when he drove the money changers from the Temple:**

John 2:13-17: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he found in the Temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>And he made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the Temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; <sup>16</sup>and to those who were selling the doves he said, Take these things away; stop making my Father's house a place of business (*merchandise in the King James Version*). <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me.

There is a lot to say about this event, but in summary, Jesus created chaos. Why? Because he walked in and saw them making the Temple *a place of business*. It was an inappropriate use of a sacred place, and he would not have anything to do with it. He created the chaos to get them to stop doing what they were doing. He gave them a very plain warning - *stop making my Father's house a place of business*.

(Source: Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary) *House of merchandise* - There was nothing wrong in the merchandise, but to bring it, for their own and others' convenience, into that most sacred place, was a high-handed profanation which the eye of Jesus could not endure.

Did the religious leaders get a cut of the money from the selling of animals used for sacrifices? We wonder. First, they made it a *place of business*, and second, they made it a *den of thieves* (Matthew 21:13). Could this be a parallel to some Christian churches today?

In other words, do not take what is sacred and dilute it with that which is common. Our society is becoming VERY casual - the way we dress, the way we work, the way we talk, the way we invoke the names of God and Jesus into everyday conversation mixed with foul language. The expression "nothing is sacred anymore" is something to consider.

Do we ever contaminate the environment of our study and worship with worldly activities? We want to be careful. Do not make sacredness a regular business activity.





Let's look at some practical applications. Christianity was established long before church buildings were established with the simplicity of meeting together where they could, without the physical responsibilities of building ownership. This early Christian example followed the pattern Jesus set of meeting followers wherever they were.

For the early Christians, worship was not about the place they met. Jesus was famous for teaching people wherever he happened to be, like on the road and in outdoor spaces, as well as in synagogues.

**Christians met where there was space, opportunity and peace. Some examples include:**

Acts 2:46: (NASB) *Day by day continuing with one mind in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.*

Acts 20:20: (NASB) *How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.*

1 Corinthians 16:19: (NASB) *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*

Acts 19:9: (NIV) *...He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.*



(Source: Wikipedia) For the first 300 years of Early Christianity, until Constantine legalized Christianity and churches moved into larger buildings, Christians typically met in homes, if only because intermittent persecution (before the Edict of Milan in 313) did not allow the erection of public church buildings.

The Jewish Christians are leaving behind the Law and its rituals. The Gentile Christians are leaving behind the Pagan temples to false gods. Both groups were to leave their past to follow something new.

Just because the early Christians did not initially own church buildings, likely due to persecution, it does not mean that we should not thousands of years later. But, we are saying that a church building is NOT necessary for effective worship. And, property ownership requires focus, money, time, maintenance, insurance, care and so on.

The opulence of church buildings today, with all the gold, artwork, stained glass and statues, is so contrary to Jesus and the disciples. What happened? Think of all the expense! How sad.

*Stop making my Father's house a place of business.* We are suggesting that the principle of the simplicity of Christianity at its origin be replicated everywhere, all the time, in every circumstance and by every Christian. Unfortunately, we are not seeing that nearly as much as we would like. What would Jesus think about the way and place we meet?



Do we focus on attaining and maintaining the physical aspects of our fellowship to the detriment of our spiritual maturity?

Jesus was protecting the spirituality of the Temple when he disrupted the commercialization going on. *Stop making my Father's house a place of business.* We want to keep that first and foremost in our minds.

Let's next look at the structure of our Christian leadership. After Jesus died, the apostles set up a unique process for attaining and maintaining Christian leadership. It was not a typical businesslike approach, and was even different than the Jewish structure of spiritual leadership. This was something different, and was how Christianity started.

Christian churches were given *overseers* or *elders* to shepherd the flock.

### Peter explains their character:

1 Peter 5:1-4: (NKJV) <sup>1</sup>*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:* <sup>2</sup>*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;* <sup>3</sup>*nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;* <sup>4</sup>*and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

The *glory that will be revealed* comes later, not before. The great Apostle Peter at Pentecost witnessed boldly to the truth and later opened the door for Gentile Christians. Peter is saying in these verses, "Elders, I'm just like you. I'm a fellow elder."

There is a tremendous lesson in Peter's amazing humility. Remember, Peter was brash early on, but we see his humility now when he says he is the same as the other elders. This equality is supposed to be spread throughout the gospel. That is the message that Peter is writing to all in the prospective church, including us now at the end of the age.

### Observations:



- Serve not because you must, but out of a willing heart.
- Serve, not for money, but out of sheer eagerness.
- Serve, not in a dominating way, but rather as a living example of Christlikeness.

Peter's example was to serve with the heart of one who just wants to honor God. Proverbs 23:26 says, *My son, give me thine heart.* This is the way to best honor and serve God. It is not about what we get; it is about what we give. It is about seeing loyalty and dedication we want to emulate, especially when we look at the humility our Christian leaders are to have.



Let's look at the decision process for determining leadership in early Christianity.

**Paul and Barnabas are on a missionary journey. We learn a lot about the appropriate Christian process:**

Acts 14:21-23: (KJV) <sup>21</sup>And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup>And when they had **ordained** <5500> them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.



**Ordained:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5500 *cheirotoneo*; from a comparative of #5495 and *teino* (to stretch); to be a hand-reacher or voter (by raising the hand), i.e. (generally) to select or appoint

**The only other use of this Greek word:**

2 Corinthians 8:18-19: (NKJV) <sup>18</sup>And we have sent with him (Titus) the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, <sup>19</sup>and not only that, but who was also **chosen** <5500> by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord himself and to show your ready mind.

The congregation had the power to internally elect their leaders because they were familiar with them and could see their fruit of the spirit. Is this contrary to what we are used to? This comes down to reliance on the spirit of God and not on the organization of man.

We need to take a hard look at the principle from Jesus of not *making my Father's house a place of business*. Compare this to Christianity worldwide today with its wealth, its leaders appointed for life from the top of the organization down, and without effective checks and balances to prevent all kinds of abuses: financial, emotional, spiritual, sexual and so on.

As we have learned from Saul of Tarsus, he was taught *at the feet of Gamaliel* (Acts 22:3) to become a Pharisee. Today, most Christian organizations use seminaries to develop pastors. This is not what is being described in the Scriptures. Are we replicating tradition or replicating the true origin of Christian history? Are we making our sacred worship a place of business or is it about honoring God through Christ in a simple yet honorable way? *Stop making my Father's house a place of business.*



Some may think we are being too critical. Yes, we are. Why? Because the simplicity of the gospel and its organization are taught to us in Scripture. Why would we go elsewhere if we already have the instructions of how Jesus and the apostles set it up? We owe him our allegiance to follow it the way he put it in place.



## ARE MY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS GOD-DRIVEN OR MAN-MADE?



Jesus was radical. As he laid out the foundation for what Christianity would look like, he continually stepped above and beyond all other worldly systems. Why? Because this was to be a spiritual church. It was to be higher and more holy than anything that had ever been seen.

AM I WILLING TO EMBRACE THIS ELEVATED STANDARD EVEN IF IT MEANS  
I MUST LET GO OF A MORE PHYSICALLY PLEASING ENVIRONMENT?



The fundamental lesson of not mixing our higher spiritual calling with mundane human ways and means can be hard to learn.

**We now need to delve into our basic morality as Christians.  
Does Jesus teach us an even higher standard than the Jewish Law?**

This piece of our conversation is one that can and will likely bring discomfort. Because we live in a time of overwhelming compromise and personal freedom, gauging what is moral has become an exercise of individual choice. As Christians, our moral choices by definition should be based on what Jesus taught and nothing less.



**Is following Christ the same as following Christianity?**

Jesus stood for the highest standards of behavior on every level. He taught us to learn the acceptable standards and then to raise the bar higher. The Sermon on the Mount is filled with examples of elevating the Law.



**Jesus taught us how to handle those who may speak out against us:**

Matthew 5:11-12: (NASB) <sup>11</sup>*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

You're blessed if you're persecuted? That's an interesting promise! Now you want abundance? *Blessed are you* if you are persecuted for his sake, as *great is your reward in heaven*. Think about how Jesus is framing this. When we are persecuted, we should not to seek revenge - that is our human reaction. But we are supposed to be able to rise above such a response and be like Jesus. I will absorb such things because Jesus absorbed such things.



## Jesus taught us how to stand up for godly righteousness, even with our enemies:

Matthew 5:43-45: (NASB) <sup>43</sup>You have heard that it was said, *You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.* <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Jesus is instructing us to be kind and gracious. It elevates us and makes us different. *You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor* - this came directly from the Old Testament. But *and hate your enemy* was added to Jewish thinking but never part of the the Law.

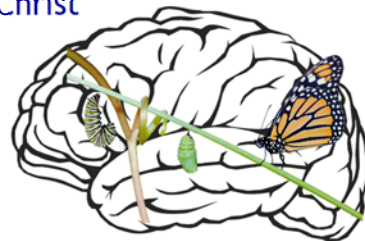
In other words, Jesus adds: "I know this is what you are used to, but here is what I am telling you." He is talking to us about the morality of our reactions and responses. He acknowledges that a lot of us have enemies. He tells us *to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*. Put them in a different category than how we think of them now. Jesus died for each and every one of his enemies. As they were whipping him and mocking him and crucifying him, he was dying for them.

That is our example. That is the kind of morality we should have in relation to those that do not like us. That is how we should be responding. It is not easy physically, but it is spiritually what we are called to be and what we are called to do.

## Jesus taught us how to handle sins of desire so they will not become sinful actions:

Matthew 5:27-29: (WEY) <sup>27</sup>You have heard that it was said, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that whoever looks at a woman and cherishes lustful thoughts has already in his heart become guilty with regard to her. <sup>29</sup>If therefore your eye, even the right eye, is a snare to you, tear it out and away with it; it is better for you that one member should be destroyed rather than that your whole body should be thrown into Gehenna (completely destroyed).

Obviously, Jesus is using an idiom, an expression that means something else. We aren't supposed to literally tear out our eyes in order to prevent looking at what we should not be looking at. Jesus elevated the standard of the old Law, which was hard enough. Now being a true follower of Christ means it is not enough not to physically commit adultery. Our minds control our bodies. Our actions are a result of our thoughts. Our minds are to be sanctified - set apart - and transformed. We are not to compromise even our thoughts. This is an elevated standard!



We love the way the Weymouth translation said *whoever looks at a woman and cherishes lustful thoughts* - when we cherish something, we give it a lot of attention. We hold it close to ourselves. Thoughts go through the minds of everybody. But what do we do with such thoughts? Jesus tells us, unequivocally, chase them out! Replace them with *something good, something pure, whatsoever is true, lovely, of good report*. Think on these things (Philippians 4:8), not on those lustful things.





This is the Christian standard. Do not make the mistake of believing we can think what we want because nobody can see. God can see! Being Christlike means we must rise above those kinds of actions and even those kinds of thoughts.



### Jesus taught us the sacred importance of the marriage covenant:

**Matthew 5:31-32:** (NASB) <sup>31</sup>*It was said, Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce;* <sup>32</sup>*but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Do not minimize this commitment. Our marriage commitment is sacred before God. Does my church tolerate lower standards of morality than what Jesus is telling us? Are they abiding by that which is sacred?

The marriage covenant is the highest promise we can make on the human plane. It is a promise before God and witnesses that says, *'til death do us part*. Jesus chides the Pharisees, who found ways to make it a lot easier to get out of marriage just because someone did not like the way their wife did this or that, or the way she looks or whatever the complaint. Jesus told them that was not the intention of God, and they must stand higher.



This is tough today because taking this stand is looked upon as foolish. Society says, if we do not get along, of course we should get a divorce and start over. No. Not according to the word and will of God and the words of Jesus himself. Do not make a mistake on this by taking it lightly. This is a significant, sacred promise Jesus says we must hold to.

This small sampling of Jesus' teachings sets a pattern of thinking and behavior in all areas of our lives.

### The rest of the New Testament verifies this as critical to following Jesus:

**Ephesians 5:1-5:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;* <sup>2</sup>*and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

There is such beauty in these words. *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you.* We are at this beautiful, wonderful offering and this excites and inspires us.

### Here is the other part of how that all works:

<sup>3</sup>*But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;* <sup>4</sup>*and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* <sup>5</sup>*For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

No *immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, silly talk or course jesting!* Does the Christianity I adhere to allow any aspects of these things in any way? Are certain attitudes or behaviors or conversations, "Eh, not that big of a deal"? Look around your spiritual environment. If standards are being lowered step-by-small-step, maybe we are not in the right place.



What is my spiritual environment willing to tolerate, willing to turn away from, willing to just let slide so that we can keep the numbers up or whatever it is that we want to do here?

## IMPORTANT POINT

Are we in contradiction to or in harmony with the words of Jesus in all that he stood for?

The beauty of all this is that wherever we come from and whatever we have done in our past can be put in perspective and forgiven as we move forward to be a true disciple of Jesus.

### Just ask Paul:

Acts 26:9-11: (NASB) <sup>9</sup>...I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup>And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup>And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

This sounds just like what happened in the Dark Ages with the Christians against the Jews, other Christians and infidels! The Apostle Paul had “godly zeal.” He was serving God in his own mind. He was wrong. He was immoral by doing those things, but he was chasing Christians down because he thought he was on God’s side. No Christian would have naturally trusted such a Christian hunting machine as Saul of Tarsus. If they saw him they would run the other way because they would have known what was coming.

Yet the brotherhood learned to believe in Paul the Apostle and follow him as he followed Christ. They followed his example in the same way he showed them how he followed Christ. Such is the power of forgiveness and the calling to Christ. If we have made mistakes in the past, we can repent and put them behind us, following the pattern Saul of Tarsus followed to become the Apostle Paul.

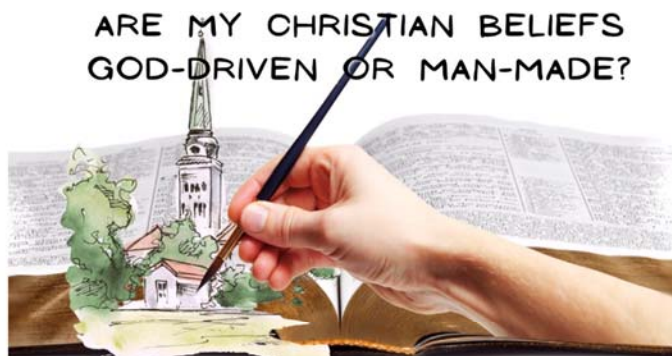


1 John 2:1-6: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup>and he himself is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. <sup>3</sup>By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>The one who says, I have come to know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>the one who says he abides in him ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked.

It is comforting to know the sincere Christian is promised Jesus as our Advocate to sit beside us in front of the Father on our behalf. We are to stand up and keep the commandments of God, even as the standards of righteousness get more relaxed and seemingly old-fashioned and out of touch with society.

Wherever we are, if we have been looking at our spiritual environment and NOT growing in the direction of Jesus’ teachings, maybe it is not the best place for us to be.

This is especially true with the degrading of society. If we are three feet above society and society degrades further, and we are still three feet above, then we have slipped too. There needs to be a greater distance because the standards of Christ never change. This is what we are focusing on in today's lesson.



The formula for true Christian morality and ethics is simple. Hear the words of Jesus, accept the words of Jesus, apply the words of Jesus and thoroughly live the words of Jesus. There are no exceptions and no exemptions.

AM I WILLING TO COMPLETELY ADOPT THESE PURELY GODLY STANDARDS, EVEN IF IT MEANS I MUST LET GO OF A HUMANLY COMFORTABLE AND COMPROMISED ENVIRONMENT?



It really ends up being simple. We want to hear, accept, apply and live the words of Jesus. If we can do this and look at the New Testament and at the rest of the Scriptures, we can see a pattern for living that is acceptable to God through Christ.



Am I going to go down that road or do I want to choose a different road instead? What am I going to do with the words of Jesus, with the standards that he set in my life here and now, today, in my Christian environment?

In Part II, we continue by examining what it means to keep the words of Jesus without compromise, how Jesus instructed us regarding giving to others, what it means to enter the experiences of the brotherhood and how Jesus taught us to prepare for his kingdom.

*So, is following Christ the same as following Christianity?  
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



## Bonus Material and Study Questions

### Recommended additional study:

#### *Death*

**Ep.1174: Did God Make Heaven and Hell Humanity's Destiny? (Part I)**

*Uncovering who goes to heaven and what happens to planet Earth*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1174-heaven-or-hell/>

**Ep.1201: Can the Dead Communicate With Us?**

*Examining after-death communications in the light of Scripture*

<https://christianquestions.com/society/1201-after-death-communications/>

**Ep.1227: Where Do the Human Soul and Spirit Go When We Die? (Part I)**

*Defining what the human soul is and is not, and its destiny at death*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1227-soul-spirit/>

#### *Following Christ / "Prosperity Gospel"*

**Ep.1188: Do We Have the Purpose of the Holy Spirit Backwards?**

*Distinguishing God's power from our own desires in our daily life*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1188-holy-spirit/>

**Ep.1141: Does Christianity Preach the Gospel?**

*Critically examining the basic principles of what the gospel teaches*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1141-gospel/>

**Ep.1018: What Does Discipleship Cost?**

*Three parables that teach us what it takes to be Jesus' followers*

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1018-following-jesus-discipleship-cost-2/>

#### *Church*

**Ep.1199: Are My Christian Beliefs Based on Truth or Error?**

*Examining biblically questionable Christian traditions and practices*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1199-tradition-truth-error/>

**Ep.1039: Have You Lost Faith in Your Spiritual Leaders?**

*The dangers, pitfalls and powerful reality of Christian leadership*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1039-spiritual-leaders/>



### *Teachings of Jesus*

#### **Ep.1213: Is God Happy With My Attitude? (Part I)**

*Uncovering the life-directing principles in the Beatitudes of Jesus*

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1213-beatitudes/>

#### **Ep.1015: Condemned to Death, How Did Jesus Love His Enemies?**

*Watching "love your enemies" unfold in Jesus' last days*

<https://christianquestions.com/inspiration/1015-love-your-enemies/>

### *Marriage*

#### **Ep.1268: How Strong Are My Relationships? (Part I)**

*Identifying the foundations, problems and practices of marriage*

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1268-christian-marriage/>

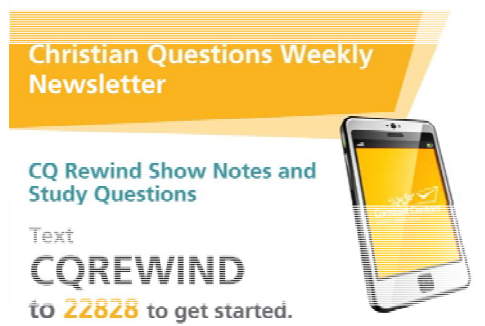
#### **Ep.1169: Is Adultery Really That Wrong?**

*Revealing and discussing the depths of damage caused by adultery*

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1169-adultery/>

*Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at [ChristianQuestions.com/youtube](https://ChristianQuestions.com/youtube):*

- What is the soul? <https://youtu.be/dwTTsWvuymU>
- What happens when we die? <https://youtu.be/6qP6ulUspuM>
- Are the dead really dead? <https://youtu.be/ay2XGpKM2K8>
- Did Jesus ever get angry? <https://youtu.be/yOu0vy02cak>



## Ep. 1283: Is Following Christ the Same as Following Christianity? (Part I):

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/christianity-part-i/>

1. What does the Greek word "*nekro*" mean? How can the dead hear Jesus' voice? With what does Jesus equate death? How can this word be used figuratively? (See John 5:25-29, 20:8-9, Luke 9:60)
2. How did man become a living soul/being? Does the Hebrew word "*nephesh*" refer to humans or to animals? What was Satan's lie to Eve? Did Adam and Eve die immediately? Explain. (See Genesis 1:20-21, 2:7, 15-17, Hebrews 6:18, 2 Peter 3:8)
3. What is death? If death is the result of sin and all sin, how do we get to heaven? (See Genesis 2:17, Romans 6:22-23, John 5:25-29, 1 Corinthians 15:21-23)
4. What had all faithful Jews awaited for generations? Who did Peter believe Jesus was? Was this good news? How did Jesus react to Peter's answer? How did Jesus represent both the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God? How did he describe the cost of discipleship to the scribe and to the rich young ruler? Why would the concept that wealth makes entrance into heaven difficult be confusing to first century Jews? (See Luke 9:18-23, Matthew 8:18-20, Mark 10:23-27, Deuteronomy 28:5)
5. Describe how Mark 10:28-30 should be looked at from a spiritual perspective:  
a) Houses b) Family c) Farms d) Persecutions  
  
Why is the concept of receiving abundant wealth through following Jesus not accurate?
6. What is the lesson we should take away from the account of Jesus driving the money changers from the Temple? Where did the early church worship? How do some churches make our Father's house a place of business? (See John 2:13-17, Acts 2:46, 19:9, 20:20, 1 Corinthians 16:19)
7. What were the admonitions for elders or overseers in 1 Peter 5:1-4? How was equality supposed to be used throughout all the prospective church members? How were elders chosen? How does this compare with the more modern methods of choosing leaders? (See Proverbs 23:26, Acts 14:21-23, 2 Corinthians 8:18-19)
8. How did Jesus raise the bar on standards of behavior compared to the accepted standards of the Jews?  
a) Handling those who speak out against us? (See Matthew 5:11-12)  
b) Standing for godly righteousness - even with our enemies? (See Matthew 5:43-45)  
c) Handling sins of desire to squelch sinful actions? (See Matthew 5:27-29)  
d) The importance of the marriage covenant? (See Matthew 5:31-32)
9. Once we have sinned, is all hope lost? What should our pattern of thinking and behavior be? What is required of us? (See Ephesians 5:1-5, Acts 26:9-11, 1 John 2:1-6)
10. How do we hear the words of Jesus, accept the words of Jesus, apply the words of Jesus and thoroughly live the words of Jesus?