

"What Matters?"

We hear many talk about “my truth” and “your truth,” but does God have a truth? Hello, I’m Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study “In Search of the Lord’s Way.” Today we’re exploring God’s truth, and it matters!

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord’s Way! We’re here to search the Scriptures for God’s will. Occasionally in my conversations, I hear people say, well, “That’s just your interpretation!” They mean that one belief is as good as any other. And they don’t believe that God has spoken clearly enough to make His will understandable. However, God has spoken, and He means what He says, and He speaks with authority. And that’s why we study what He says. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

I Sometimes hear people say, well, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus.” For them, loving Jesus is all that matters. Some quote John 13:34 to 35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Now they correctly see that love for others as an identifying mark of Christianity. The problem is that they think love is the only identifying mark of a disciple. Are there any other things that identify a true disciple of the Lord?

Well, God desires all people to be saved, but He also desires that they come to “the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2 verse 4). Well, why? Because God holds the truth to be vital to our salvation. The Lord Jesus said in John 8:31 to 32, “If you abide in my word, (then) you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” A true disciple listens to the Lord Jesus and doesn’t try to edit or rewrite His words. He doesn’t try to remake Christianity in the image of 21st century culture. “The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24 to 25).

Now, we offer this study free on what matters to God. If you’d like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we’ll read from Matthew 17:1 to 5, and explore the fact that life in God’s will matters.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 17 the first five verses when Jesus is upon the high mountain and transfigured.

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

And that’s good advice today. That we need to listen to Him. Let’s pray together. Oh, Father, help us always to keep Jesus as Lord in our hearts and to listen closely to the things that He says. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Jesus distinguished his disciples not only by their love (John 13:34 to 35) but also by their willingness to remain in his Word. The Lord said in John 8:31 to 32 that, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Now, "Continuing in His words" matters to the Lord. It has always mattered what we believe. We can't claim to be true disciples of Jesus, if we're not willing to abide in his words. Now, that's how the Lord distinguishes his true followers from people who claim to be His followers. Now, authentic disciples actually hear what He said and live by His words. Jesus once asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6 verse 46).

For Jesus to be our Lord means that He must rule our lives. You remember, Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14 verse 15). Loving the Lord means obeying His Word; we need to do what He says the way that He says to do it. The Bible warns us not to change the gospel. You remember Paul said in Galatian 1:6 to 9, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" This is strong and frightening language.

Now not only must we be careful what we teach, we must also be careful what teachers we support. The apostle John said, that, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. Now, if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds". Now, while some say this passage speaks only about the deity of Jesus; and certainly that's under thought; we recognize that there is a principle that cannot be ignored. The principle: to change God's teaching is offensive to God and considered by God evil.

All of God's word is sacred. To change any part of it or to go beyond its teaching is to ignore what is Divine and then if we just please ourselves we can offend God. You see when we change things we aren't listening to the Lord. Man-made teachings step into a realm that belongs only to the Lord. We have no right to say to God well, "We think our way is better than Your way, so we're going to change the teaching to suit ourselves." Those who teach false doctrines choose what is human over what is Divine. They actually defy God. And whether we teach a false doctrine or support a false teacher, we're guilty of committing an evil deed. You see, it matters to God whether or not we support error. Love means staying with God and His word.

What God says matters to our destiny! Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We can't select what we like in God's teaching and ignore what we do not like. The standard, which will judge us on the last day, is God's word. Now, God is God, and He doesn't take opinion polls to determine the Truth. We live in an age that stresses political correctness, but God is not subject to our culture. While we see changing opinions in our culture, God has spoken to all people in all places for all time (Jude 3). His will doesn't change. And we cannot assume that God's grace will include every idea that people embrace.

Rather than thinking that we can say and do religiously what we please, we should seek God's face and follow His will. The real issue is: Are we willing to yield our will to God's will and make Him Lord of our lives? Are we willing to listen to Him and obey God? Many people think they can live and believe as

they desire and God won't know or care! But God does know and God does care. We can't believe man-made doctrines and practice man-made traditions and expect God to be pleased about it. He wants us to follow His will and to give glory to His name. And you can't serve God and also serve yourself!

Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 to 14, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Now, these verses surprise most people. They think that nearly everyone is on the right road, but that's not the way things really are. The broad way is easy and filled with people. It's going to be popular but tragic. Not many people are willing to study for themselves and find the truth by looking to the words of Jesus.

Acting on our own wisdom, our own judgment, rather than obeying God reveals a lack of faith in the wisdom of God. Proverbs 3:5 to 7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." We must believe in God's wisdom and not our own. God sees and knows things that we can't see or know. His understanding is unlimited; and we need to trust that what He teaches is right. Even when we don't understand why He says what He says, we need to trust His wisdom.

Let's take a look at ourselves. Let's consider what we believe and practice as Christians. "Are my beliefs the will of man or the will of God? Are my religious practices the will of man or the will of God?" Can we read this teaching or find this practice in the New Testament? Or did this belief or practice come in later centuries by the design of men? If we can read that the Lord or the apostles taught this belief or practiced it, we can have confidence that God approves of it. But if it's something that began much later, and is a departure from the Truth, it should have no place in the life of a faithful Christian. We should leave the humanly designed theology and return to the Lord's will!

People should investigate their beliefs and practices, asking the question, "Is this Biblical or is this something from men?" This would mean that we have to do some deeper study into the Bible, to see what we would find. If we find it's Biblically approved, let's stay with it; but if it departs from the New Testament, we should abandon it. Forty-five years ago I was preaching in a country church in Oklahoma. And I met a sweet, wonderful lady named "Oleta." She had been sprinkled as an infant in her church. When she became an adult, she got acquainted with some members of the church of Christ, and they began studying the Bible.

When some members of the church told her that we baptize by immersion and only baptize people old enough to believe and repent, she was surprised and began asking questions. Well the members replied, "Well, that's the way they did it in the Bible." Well, this upset Oleta. She was just sure that what she had been taught, as a child, was in the Bible! So, she got out her Bible, and she studied for days, looking for verses to show baptism includes the sprinkling of infants. Well the more she read, however, the more she realized that the Scriptures taught the immersion of penitent believers. Oleta was honest and said, "I was studying to prove them wrong, and what I found was that Oleta was wrong." This honest lady saw that even cherished beliefs can be wrong. It wasn't easy for Oleta to reach that conclusion, but she was honest with God and with herself.

The baptism into Christ, is a burial. The very word "baptize" means immerse. The Bible says in Romans 6 and verse 4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

The Bible also teaches that the early church baptized only penitent believers. Acts 2:41 says, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Again, Acts 5 and verse 14 says, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." And Acts 8 and verse 1, it says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." You see these were penitent people old enough to believe and receive the Word. They weren't infants.

I've also known some who believed that they were saved by faith alone and didn't need to be baptized. Mark 16:15 to 16 says, however, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Now, according to these verses, preaching and believing take place before baptism, and one is baptized before he is saved. Once people heard and believed the gospel they were baptized, and this resulted in their salvation. Acts 2:38 says, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Ananias told Saul, after three days of prayer in Acts 22:16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Now if you're being taught that baptism isn't necessary to salvation, I ask you to study the Scriptures. Now while faith is necessary to salvation, the Bible also teaches the need for baptism. God washes away our sins at the time of baptism.

You know, some think that every doctrine of every church is okay, and every doctrine is as good as every other doctrine. But is that so? Doesn't the truth matter to God? Now, it may sound neighborly to get along with everyone, but to believe everything is to believe nothing. It doesn't make sense to believe contradictory teachings are still all true. Those who hold this idea aren't listening to God; they're listening to modern culture.

Galatians 1:6 to 9 says there is but one gospel. Well, if there is only one, there cannot be many. Would you want to accept a "distorted" gospel? What if you were given false hope? Wouldn't that be tragic to believe a doctrine that departs from God's word? Believing everything is all right, isn't listening to the Lord Jesus; it's listening to ourselves. Wouldn't it be better to stay on safe ground? Now in the Bible we can read the things that God approves and teaches. We can know what He wills for our lives, and for our churches, and for our beliefs. We need to conform to His words in the New Testament. And so why not study the Scriptures and find out for yourself? You might find that you're like Oleta. Examine what you believe! See if it's according to what the Bible teaches.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we are so grateful for Your love. And we're thankful that You've given us Your word. Help us to be true followers and to stay within Your teaching. In Jesus name, Amen.

God's declaration in Matthew 17:5, "Listen to Him," is still relevant today. There's a thousand voices seeking our attention, but God points only to His Son Jesus. Moses was a great lawgiver, but God points to His Son. Elijah was a great prophet, but God points to His Son. Only Jesus has the words of life (John 6 and verse 68). "Listen to Him!" Love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and serve Him. Study the Scriptures and examine your life. Are you walking in the Lord's way?

Now, if you can't read in Scripture what you believe and practice, abandon those things and come to the Lord. Let Him lead you to eternal life. Proverbs 3:5 to 7 says again says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil."

Now, love moves us to trust Jesus. Love moves us to confess faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. We gladly acknowledge Jesus is Lord and we belong to Him. Love also moves us to think of sin differently. We realize that sin will ruin our lives and so we repent of sin and turn to the Lord's way. Love moves us to clothe ourselves with Christ in baptism (Galatians 3 and verse 27). We're baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3), where Christ shed His blood. And in baptism God washes away our sins and gives us newness of life (Acts 22:16; and Romans 6:4 to 7). Why not take the necessary step of being baptized into Christ? And that's when you'll receive the forgiveness of your sins. And today is the best day for you to do that.

We hope that today's study about God's Word matters and how it matters, has stirred you to recognize your responsibility to the Lord Jesus. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office it's toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. You can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. And if you get a hold of us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money or to exploit you. We're here to help teach God's word so that you can go to heaven.

There's no better day than today to get your life back on track. And you can do that by worshiping at church. There's probably a church of Christ that's in your area. Why not worship with them today? And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So, keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Let em know that you're watching. And as always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.