



COLLEGE HEIGHTS  
BAPTIST CHURCH

# The State of the Church

Aug 24-30

&

*The Bible Doesn't Say That!*

(myths we believe)

Aug 31- Oct 4

CHBC Daily Scripture Readings

I probably sound like a broken record, but the world has changed in 2020. At the same time, the church's mission has not changed. This Sunday, we will be taking the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper has been taken by Christians for 2000 years during times of war, times of peace, times of famine, times of plenty, and yes, in times of pandemic as well. The Lord's Supper is one of those connection points that every generation of Christians has with each other. And while different Christians have different beliefs about the Lord's Supper/Communion/Eucharist, it is a connection point that stretches across all denominations of Christianity.

This week, our readings will center on the mission of the church. We will discuss the state of College Heights Baptist Church on Sunday morning along with taking the bread and the cup. The world has changed. Our community has changed. The Word of God and the mission of the church has not.

### **Monday, August 24 - Colossians 1:15-23**

The mission of the church must begin with our leader: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is Jesus' sacrifice in death which allows us to be part of the family of God, the body of Christ. Without God at the center of our mission, the church is no longer God's church. It becomes a collection of people who like to spend time with each other and sometimes do a good thing for other people. That is not what the church is supposed to be. The body of Christ is to bring glory (praise, worship) to God. The body of Christ is to act as Jesus would act if he were on this earth today. The body of Christ is supposed to allow the Spirit to influence everything the church does.

This week let's examine what College Heights is and what it should be: are we a people who center our thoughts and actions upon what God wants us to do? Do we allow Jesus to be the head of College Heights? This can be said another way: do our actions bring glory to God? As we go through the devotions this week, I want you to write down these answers as you think about them. Share them with others if you'd like

or keep them to yourselves. For the rest of this week, we will look at different passages of Scripture which single out a certain aspect of the life of the church (and our individual lives as well). We will ask the question, are we bringing glory to God through our minds, piety, service, and evangelism?

For today, pray through Colossians 1:15-20 several times. It is thought to be an ancient hymn that the early Christians would sing in worship. Thank God for his supremacy. Thank Jesus for the healing he brought to each and every one of us. Ultimately, give glory to God for his leadership of your life and his church.

## **Tuesday, August 25 - Romans 12:2**

I know too many people who check their brains at the door when they come to church (I also know too many pastors who like it that way, but that's another discussion). It is quite clear to me from Romans 12:2 that the church is supposed to bring glory to God through our minds. This is not a statement to say that you need to have a certain level of intelligence to be a Christian. Praise be to God that is not the case! Instead, this is a statement that learning more about Jesus, studying the Bible, asking questions and seeking answers are all part of worshipping God. It is through this thinking, this conversation with God and other Christians that we grow. It is through these discussions that we are able to discern what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God is.

How do you think College Heights does in this regard? Do we bring glory to God through the renewing of our minds? At College Heights, we have opportunities to do this through Bible Studies and Discipleship Classes. As you have probably learned about me over the past two years, bringing glory to God through our minds is a passion of mine. If this is an area where you need guidance, let me help guide you. Let's journey together on learning more about God through different studies. If that is

something that you believe God is leading you to do, let me know. Let's set up a plan to work on bringing glory to God through our minds.

### **Wednesday, August 26 - Psalm 133**

We close our Wednesday night study of Psalms with the study of this short psalm about community. Verse 1 is the theme. The church is a beautiful preview of eternity in heaven when we get along and have the same focus. What does it mean for the community to have unity? What does unity mean to you? Write down some thoughts and let's talk about them tonight.

### **Thursday, August 27 - 1 John 3:16-18**

Have you ever heard the phrase "I know you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?" It's a phrase that's been in use for almost 100 years meaning, can you do everything that you say you can do? Another phrase that you might be more aware of is "practice what you preach." This phrase is asking you to be pious. Piety is being reverent toward God. It is respecting God and his laws and commandments. It is saying that you know what God commands you to do and then you follow through and actually do it.

How can one love through truth and action as 1 John 3:18 says? One way to answer that is through the word piety. In our lives and in the life of the church, we are to bring glory to God through our piety toward God. There were two sins that the Prophets continued to warn Israel about: worship of idols and not taking care of people, particularly, the poor, widow, orphan, and immigrant. There were two statements that Jesus made when asked what the greatest commandment was: love God, love your neighbor. See the connection? To be pious means to worship and love God alone and to care for and love all people. How are you doing in bringing glory to God through

piety? How is College Heights doing in bringing glory to God through piety? What can we do to love God and love people better than we are now?

### **Friday, August 28 - Micah 6:8**

We say it most Sunday mornings. When you say it, do you think about the words? Seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God is living a life of service. The best definition of justice is not penalizing people for wrongs committed, but breaking down barriers so everyone has equal opportunity. For example, when College Heights put in the ramp into the sanctuary that was a type of justice. It allows people with difficulty walking equal access to the auditorium. Kindness is the Hebrew word *hesed*. This is a type of kindness or faithfulness that is not forced because one is just “doing what they are supposed to.” Instead, *hesed* is a kindness founded upon love and commitment. Walking humbly with God can be described as living the “with-God” life. It is embracing how God describes himself to Moses by saying “I will be with you” (Exod. 3:11). The “with-God” life embraces what Rev. 21:3 says about “they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

Seek justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God. It’s not just a motto, but should be our way of life. It should be the description of how we live a life of service to others. We are to bring glory to God through the service to others. How are you doing with living out Micah 6:8? Are you bringing glory to God through serving others? What about College Heights? Are we bringing glory to God by serving others?

### **Saturday, August 29 - Matthew 28:18-20**

Go and make disciples. We bring glory to God through evangelism. How are you doing in that regard? How about College Heights? We’ve done a few evangelism models at the church over the past two years. We talked about relational evangelism

where you tell about Jesus to the people you already know. We've asked the question: "Who's your One?" We've done discipleship groups where you had the opportunity to invite others to learn about Jesus along with you. Eternity is too important to not tell others about Jesus. Are you bringing glory to God by telling others about the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus? Is College Heights bringing glory to God by telling others about our Leader and Savior, Jesus?

### **Sunday, August 30 - 1 Corinthians 11:26**

We take the Lord's Supper this morning in church. Examine your heart this morning and make sure your heart, mind, and soul are prepared to remember the sacrifice of Jesus this morning.

### **THE BIBLE DOESN'T SAY THAT!**

There are sayings we have said so much that we think they are in the Bible. There are sayings that *sound* like they are in the Bible, they fit with what we believe about the world, and yet when we look to Scripture those statements are not found. Sometimes, in fact, the opposite is actually what the Bible says. I heard it said like this a few months ago: "sometimes you are going to realize that grandma and Jesus said different things. Who are you going to follow?"

Over the next five weeks, we are going to examine five myths that we believe are in the Bible, but actually aren't. None of these myths are outright lies. Instead, we might consider these myths "half-truths." We will be looking at Scriptures that examine if there is any truth in these myths, and what does the Bible actually say in regard to these myths we believe.

## **MYTH 1: EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON**

### **Monday, August 31 - Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

Everything happens for a reason. In a scientific way, this is true. We live in a world of cause and effect. We live in a world where every action has consequences that follow. However, the majority of the time when we use the phrase “everything happens for a reason” we don’t mean it in this way, but we use the phrase in times of horrific grief. When there is unexpected loss of a loved one or a cancer diagnosis, a well-meaning friend will use this phrase. It’s supposed to bring some sort of comfort but rarely does.

The problem with the phrase “everything happens for a reason” is we usually attribute suffering to an event that God puts into our lives for an unknown (to us) reason. What the Bible tells us is that God is not the cause of suffering (James 1:13). Instead, we have free will, and human choice is usually the cause of the predicament you find yourself in. That is why this myth is more of a half-truth. The end of our Scripture today is Moses explaining this cause and effect to Israel. We have a choice in the matter. We have human freedom to make wise and poor decisions. Our wisdom or lack of it influences the world around us. When we use the phrase “everything happens for a reason,” it’s usually an act of ignoring human choices which cause negative consequences. These verses in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 tell us that our freedom(s) lead to what happens next. Will you choose life?

### **Tuesday, September 1 - Jonah 1:1-4**

Sometimes God does bring about certain events because of the actions of people. Our passage today explains this type of situation. Jonah does not go to Nineveh, so God causes a storm to arise. It is my opinion that this is the exception more than the rule in the world that God created, but it does happen. The way we need

to look at life is a balance between God causing all things to happen and God having no influence on the world. The theological way of describing this is a balance between Calvinism and Deism. A simple definition of Calvinism is that God is in control of every detail in life and humans have no control over anything we do (including accepting salvation). Deism, on the other hand, suggests that God created the world, but then “backed-off” and is not active, nor involved in the world since creation.

How can that balance work in each of our lives? Let us seek to understand that God is active in the world today and there are spiritual events that occur that cannot be explained in human ways. At the same time, let us realize that God’s most common way to work in the world is through God’s people. God does wonderful things in this world when God’s people listen and act according to God’s commands. The rest of the book of Jonah is a great example. The people of Nineveh are saved from destruction because Jonah obeys the command God put on his life (let’s ignore Jonah’s reaction to that salvation for the moment). What does God want to do in the world today, but God’s people are not listening? What does God want to do in Cleburne, TX, but College Heights isn’t listening? Let’s listen and not run away from God’s command.

### **Wednesday, September 2 - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

We start a new series on Wednesday nights tonight covering 1 & 2 Thessalonians. First Thessalonians was likely the first book written of the New Testament, likely written around AD 50, about 20 years after the death of Jesus. Paul writes this letter to a church he founded, and the story of this church’s beginning can be found in Acts 17:1-9. It is a letter written to this young church as pastoral encouragement while Paul cannot be with them in person.

The opening ten verses are what we will cover tonight. It is an extended greeting and thanksgiving for the Thessalonian church. One of the themes which will be covered is found in verse 6-8. The Thessalonians have “bought in” to the faith that Paul



showed them, and now others are learning for their example. What a great example for us to follow as well. Imitate the Lord; imitate more mature Christians; let us become people others can imitate. Examine your life. Who are people you have used as an example of your faith in Christ? Thank God for those godly men and women. Is your life a model life for others? Are you setting an example for the next generation of Christians? What can you do to mentor the next generation? Pray for God to help you follow him more closely and then have opportunities to be a model for others to imitate.

### **Thursday, September 3 - Matthew 10:29**

Our one verse for today seems to indicate the opposite of what I've been proclaiming all week. It seems to support the myth that "everything happens for a reason." But let's be slow to make conclusions based on one verse alone. There is more than one verse in the Bible. And what seems to be the case when we read the entirety of Scripture is that just because God knows what will happen, doesn't mean he forces all things to happen.

A few months ago, my daughter was very excited to show me a book she found while reading on her tablet. She was telling me all about how she would get to the end of the page and she would get to choose what the main character did next. I grinned because when I was her age, I used to like these "choose your own adventure books" as well (though I didn't read mine on a tablet). In a way, you are in complete control of what happens in these stories. You ordain for the characters what will happen and you force the action to go one way or the other. In a normal book, that's not the case. As the reader, you may know what will happen as the story moves along, but you don't force that event to take place.

I see God in this second way of reading a book, and I believe that Matthew 10:29 supports this. He knows what will happen as history moves along, but that doesn't mean he makes the choices for us. God is not choosing to put us in dangerous

positions or have heartbreaking catastrophe. God is not forcing us to make bad choices or good choices for that matter. God is not choosing what path we will take in life. That is up to people and individual choices have consequences that affect the individual and community. God knows the choices you will make, but that doesn't mean that God chose it for you.

### **Friday, September 4 - Proverbs 3:11-12**

“God must be punishing me for something.” Too many of us think this when a horrible event occurs. In order to fit into the myth “Everything happens for a reason,” we make assumptions that get very morbid, very fast. “God gave my child cancer to get my attention because I haven't been obedient” is just mind-boggling. Read that over again. Do we really think that God would do that? I don't. You may point to Exodus 34:7 where it says the sins of the parents will visit the kids to the third and fourth generation. However, there is also Ezekiel 18:20 that says each person is punished for their own wickedness, not the children and not the parents. There is disagreement in the two passages and I will save that discussion for another day.

Let's get to our passage for today. What does the Lord's discipline mean? This sounds like an argument for “everything happens for a reason.” First of all, we need to understand that Proverbs 3:11-12 does speak of God's discipline and it is an example of God's love to us. Like a parent, the Bible says God disciplines because God loves. However, let's remember that the myth of “everything happens for a reason” is false because it is only half true. To say that everything bad happening to you is because of mistakes you have made negates the simple fact that other people's choices impact your life.

What if this passage is speaking to the cause and effect that God put into motion when he created this world? That our sin has consequences because making a bad choice leads to bad conclusions? In a way, this is still “everything happens for a

reason,” but it’s more of a statement of cause and effect instead of God causing an unrelated tragedy to occur “to teach you a lesson.”

What am I trying to say today? God’s discipline is real. God disciplines you because God loves you. God’s discipline is much less sinister than we make it out to be. God didn’t give you or a loved one a disease because you have been selfish and prideful.

### **Saturday, September 5 - Genesis 2:15-17**

The choices we make are the reason consequences occur. This has been the main idea correcting the myth “everything happens for a reason.” The reason is not that God is just waiting to smite us. The reason is humans make poor choices. Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the garden. Adam was told to take care of the garden and not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We know the choice Adam and Eve made. We know the consequences that followed.

This is where “everything happens for a reason” stops. It does not extend to events that have no cause and effect relationship. “Everything happens for a reason” might give comfort sometimes, but in my experience, it rarely does. Instead of using this phrase, when you are searching for words to tell someone, tell them “God loves you and he will help you through this.” That’s the conclusion I see in the Adam and Eve story. Are there consequences for their choices? Yes. Yet God still takes care of them, protects them, and loves them. Their relationship with God continues outside of the garden.

That’s something we can learn as well. When tragic events are occurring, shrugging your shoulders and saying “everything happens for a reason” is not going to help. Relying on a God who loves you, takes care of you, and helps you will comfort you in those difficult days. I pray that when you are in one of those seasons of grief, you take these words to heart and grow closer to God.

## **Sunday, September 6 - Psalm 62**

“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation...For God alone my soul waits in silence; for my hope is from him.” God is the one we wait upon, God is the one we trust in. Join with fellow “trust-ers in God” this morning and worship!

## **MYTH 2: GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES**

### **Monday, September 7 - Leviticus 23:22**

It's not often you get a devotional reading for Leviticus, is it? This verse is extremely important for the community of Israel. It is essentially Israel's Social Security plan. The owners of the land could not reap to the edges of their land. If they dropped wheat while harvesting, they could not pick it back up. Instead, those who had no land and those who were impoverished were able to come behind the reapers and gather for themselves in order to have food. We see this social security system in action in the book of Ruth.

God helps those who help themselves is the myth which will be exposed this week. Like last week's myth, it is not completely inaccurate, but it is not the message of the gospel either. The half-truth is seen in our verse in Leviticus. Yes. The poor had to go and get the grain for themselves. No. They didn't have to plant it or pay for it, and they didn't lose their opportunity to collect the grain if they were poor for too long. The farmers were required by Law to provide for the poor from their land.

A thought for you as we begin this week: what are your judgments about the poor and the alien? Has the myth of “God helps those who help themselves” corrupted your view of others who are not “successful by the world's standards?” What does Leviticus 23:22 say about how God wants us to treat one another?

## **Tuesday, September 8 - 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13**

If there were four verses to support the myth “God helps those who help themselves,” these are the four verses. “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. Do their own work quietly and...earn their own living.” There is truth to these statements, but the context of 2 Thessalonians is important to understanding that truth. The majority of people in the community of believers believe that Jesus is going to return immediately. Therefore, some in the community have decided to quit working and just wait on Jesus. These people who have way too much time on their hands are bothering everybody else who is working and these laggards are now relying on the workers to provide food for them. Paul tells these people to get back to work!

How do Paul’s instructions to Thessalonica give instruction to us? I think the key in these verses is that the people who stopped working were able to work. To universally apply these verses today would neglect the fact that the vast majority of people who are poor and unemployed are looking for work and cannot find it. It neglects the fact that some people cannot help themselves.

In addition to all of that, when we read Scripture, let’s stop thinking about other people and think about how it applies to us. Are you being a busybody? Are you earning your living? Pray for God to show how you can not live in idleness and not grow weary in doing what is right.

## **Wednesday, September 9 - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16**

This passage gives a history of the ministry that Paul and company had in Thessalonica. In it, you see how they made their living while beginning the church and how they treated the new Christians. I think this relationship that Paul had with the new church is a good reminder of a type of relationship we need to have with each other. We are to be pure, upright, and blameless toward one another. Let us treat each other

like we would treat our children. Let's spend some time tonight talking about these relationships as well as other themes which occur in these verses.

### **Thursday, September 10 - James 1:27**

A recent Barna poll was done and 8 in 10 Americans think "God helps those who help themselves" is a verse in the Bible. Half of respondents even stated that they believed it was a central belief of the Bible. I probably should have told you on Monday, but no such verse exists. So where does the statement come from? It actually predates Jesus! Origins of the phrase come from 5th century BC Greek Philosophers. Most notably for American culture, it was recited as fact in *Poor Richard's Almanac* by Benjamin Franklin in 1736.

"God helps those who help themselves" is not in Scripture but James 1:27 is. Too often, "God helps those who help themselves" is a phrase used to get out of loving our neighbors and putting our faith into action. It is a phrase where we justify someone's poverty. They don't deserve help because they haven't worked hard enough. Please reread James 1:27. It doesn't say "take care of the poor and widows *unless* they don't deserve it. If they don't deserve it, then let them rot." There are no conditions put on the care we are supposed to give.

Do you put conditions on who you will help based on what the other person has done? That's not biblical. Pray a prayer of confession if this is the case. Ask for forgiveness. Then prepare your heart to help someone in need.

### **Friday, September 11 - Proverbs 10:4; 19:17**

"Pray and work." That is what a young seminary student and another ordained Baptist minister did on one Sunday morning, March 7, 1965. John Lewis and Hosea Williams led a group of 600 in prayer and worship and then they put their faith into action. The group planned to march from Selma to Montgomery, AL, but did not get far

into their 54 mile journey. Marching for voting rights for African Americans, the group was stopped on the Edmund Pettis bridge. It was at this bridge where the non-violent protest met a line of police who brutally beat the marchers and left 50 of these men and women, who began the day in prayer, hospitalized. John Lewis suffered a fractured skull. “Bloody Sunday,” as it has become known, is a day that is recognized as a turning point for voting rights as the Voting Rights Act was passed later that year.

“Pray and work.” The entire book of Proverbs is a good example of this phrase. The two verses singled out today show us the importance of both. Saying that “God helps those who help themselves” is a myth does not negate the importance of hard work. Far from it. If I were to provide logic from these two verses, I’d suggest that we should work hard in order to be financially sound (not a guarantee, but let’s keep going), so that we can provide needed resources to those who are in poverty. We can’t stop reading the Bible after seeing verses like Proverbs 10:4. We must include those verses with verses like Proverbs 19:17 to show the obligations that those who are rich have to those who are poor. Let’s pray to see how God wants us to work and then pray again to see who God wants us to help while we have been diligent to work. Pray and Work.

### **Saturday, September 12 - Romans 5:6-11**

We covered a few of these verses several weeks ago during our last sermon series, but they are worth talking about again. Romans 5 exposes the myth “God helps those who help themselves.” The grace that God gives us is proof that “God helps those who *can’t* help themselves.” If salvation was only available to people who could help themselves in that regard, we would all be hopeless. Instead, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” “While we were weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.” If we are to pass on grace to others, how could we follow a myth that “God helps those who help themselves?” We must help other people, no matter who we feel

is responsible for their place in life. If Christ died for them, then his church should help them. Praise be to God that God helps those who *can't* help themselves.

### **Sunday, September 13 - Psalm 63:1-8**

We long to be in the presence of God as a man anguishing in the desert with no water. Fill your cup today worshipping with your community of believers. Be as filled as you would be at an all-you-can-eat buffet!

### **MYTH 3: GOD WON'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE**

#### **Monday, September 14 - 1 Corinthians 10:13**

If you find the statement “God won’t give you more than you can handle” in the Bible, you likely base that proverb on 1 Corinthians 10:13. However, if we are talking about this statement during this sermon series, you know I’m about to say that it isn’t completely true. First Corinthians 10:13 is less about you and more about God. This verse is more about what God can handle than about what you can handle. God will always provide a way out of the temptation or testing (same word in greek) in which you find yourself.

For the Corinthian church, temptation was on every street corner, almost literally. It was a sea port city with pagan temples and religion for idols from around the world. Many of the Corinthian Christians were likely converts for these religions which included rituals such as temple prostitution and drunkenness. Temptations and reminders from a former life were everywhere. Paul is encouraging the people to be resolved when facing the testing from their former life.

For today, let’s expose this myth in this way: it should not be “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” Instead, it should be “God won’t allow testing to be more than God can handle for you.” Put God in the driver’s seat of your life instead of you.



Let 1 Corinthians 10:13 be an encouragement that the testing you are facing is common to everyone. Everybody struggles. However, God is faithful and will take care of you during these struggles. What is burdening you today? What temptation is giving you trouble? God will provide a way out. Pray today for God to lead you so that you may endure the temptations of this life.

## **Tuesday, September 15 - James 1:13-14**

Today, we expose another side of the myth “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” Yesterday, we saw that it is less about what you can handle and more about what God can handle for you. Today, we read James 1:13-14 where it clearly shows the first half of a myth as a falsehood. It is not God who is giving you these troubles. God himself tempts no one. It is the Evil One who is the tempter. Not only that, we don’t exactly need God to tempt us. We stumble into temptation on our own very well.

When I am able to work in the church office every day, I usually take my lunch. Usually, it was something healthy. As the morning would move forward, sometimes I would have to run an errand. About 10:30, I would think “you know, I could wait half an hour to run that errand and grab lunch on my way back to the office. Wait, no I brought my lunch. I should eat that.” Then, I would still end up waiting to run the errand, still believing in my mind that I would come back to eat my healthy lunch. Instead, I would come back to the office with Chicken Express. I didn’t need God’s help to tempt me in this way.

It is very important that we do not give in to temptation. Whether I can tell a silly story about temptation or if it is a serious concern with life and death ramifications, temptation must be avoided. Let’s make sure we realize that the temptation we face does not come from God. God does not tempt; God leads us not into temptation, but delivers us from the Evil One. Today, thank God for who he is. Thank God that God

does not tempt us. Instead, God helps us every step of the way to make the right choice in the moment of temptation. Thank God for the times he has saved you from temptation and given you a way out.

### **Wednesday, September 16 - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13**

Our passage for Bible Study tonight shows the deep affection that Paul had for the church in Thessalonica. I almost see a similar mindset to what we might have had throughout this year. Being separated from each other, we have longed for the fellowship we once had. We feel as if we are continuing to be blocked from uniting. When we could bear it no longer, we made modifications to have some form of fellowship, much like Paul finally sent Timothy to see the Thessalonians. We pray faithfully to see the end of this separation and restore those who have fallen away because of this predicament. Maybe there are some other connections we can make as well. Let's talk through these issues and what can be done about them tonight.

### **Thursday, September 17 - 1 Peter 5:7**

Our verse today builds upon the theme which we have been stating all week. God didn't give you this. And it's not about what you can handle. Instead, give God those anxieties. The promise of the Bible is not that life will be easy. The promise of the Bible is that God will help you in the days that are difficult. A poem I have found best expresses this truth. It is by a woman named Annie Johnson Flint, written in 1918, and has since been put to music. In some older hymnals, "What God Hath Promised" is a great word of hope as we struggle with difficulty in life. May you be blessed by considering Annie's words today:

God has not promised skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;

God has not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

Refrain:

But God has promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
Unfailing kindness, undying love.

God has not promised we shall not know  
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;  
He has not told us we shall not bear  
Many a burden, many a care.

God has not promised smooth roads and wide,  
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;  
Never a mountain rocky and steep,  
Never a river turbid and deep.

### **Friday, September 18 - Zechariah 9:11-12**

I understand the reason some people believe strongly in the myth “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” We’ve already shown this week that this isn’t true as God didn’t give it to you and it’s not about what you can handle, but there is truth in the background of this phrase. The spirit surrounding this phrase is a spirit of hope. It is a calming mechanism when we are anxious about the weight of events in life. It is a phrase of hope to some degree. As Christians, we should be what Zechariah describes as “prisoners of hope.” We have a trust in God that he will take care of us. God is

active in this world and will act on our behalf. We believe that God uses his power for good in this world and protects his people. We have hope and nothing that happens in this world should lead us to stray from that hope.

Why do Christians have hope? “Because of the blood of [God’s] covenant with [us].” Because of God’s action on this earth, through the covenant he inaugurated by the Son of God taking the sins of the world upon himself, we have been set free and that allows us hope.

Are you a “prisoner of hope?” Do you confidently believe in the hope and promise that God will set us free from whatever “waterless pit” you are facing? Give praise to God today for the wonderful gift of hope!

### **Saturday, September 19 - Romans 8:35-39**

You might be facing frustration and difficulty this morning. You may need a statement such as “God won’t give you more than you can handle” in order to make it through the day. Instead of relying on this half-truth, rely on Romans 8:38-39. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. No difficulty, no person, no earthly or spiritual power, and not even death can separate you from the love of God. Take time to pray this morning. Pray for God’s protection over your activities today. Thank God for his promise of protection. Then, live your life to the fullest today knowing that God is with you and nothing can take you away from him who loves you.

### **Sunday, September 20 - Psalm 64:10**

Taking refuge in the Lord is the source of true happiness. Let us rejoice in the Lord together this morning!

## **MYTH 4: GOD SAID IT, I BELIEVE IT, THAT SETTLES IT**

### **Monday, September 21 - Deuteronomy 23:12-14**

We may have said “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” before or some version of this type of myth, but none of us believe it. I repeat, none of us actually take the Bible literally nor should we.

Business meetings in the early 20th century were high stress events. There was this new technology called indoor plumbing and the debate raged if churches should install these new conveniences. Some believed that the Bible spoke to this issue and that no such behavior should occur within the church walls. Deuteronomy 23:12-14 was preached from pulpits across the United States to support the premise that no one should use the bathroom inside of God’s house (I’m very serious. This was a major issue).

This is what I mean by saying that “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” is a myth. Nobody today follows today’s reading literally. When you make a statement like this week’s myth, you don’t actually believe it. You believe it in regards to certain laws and teachings, especially teachings of Jesus and in the New Testament, but you easily throw away certain laws and issues found in the Old Testament. By fully supporting this myth, you are either saying that some of the Bible is not what God said, or since all of the Bible is God’s Word, you take the writings, including those like Deuteronomy 23:12-14, at face value and apply them literally to your lives in 2020. There is a better way to believe that “all Scripture is God-breathed.” There is value in all of the Bible. We must find the value as we study all of the books of the Bible. For today, pray for God to show you the truths that you can learn about God through all Scripture, including today’s passage. While it may not tell us literally what we are to do, what can it tell us about our relationship with God?

## Tuesday, September 22 - Leviticus 19:27-28

There was once a story of a teenager who wanted to get a tattoo. Knowing that he needed his parents' permission, he goes to ask his father and his father gives a firm no. The father then proceeds to go to Leviticus 19:28 to show his son that the Bible clearly says that no person should get tattoos. His son is disappointed, but understands. When he goes to his room, he gets out his Bible and goes to Leviticus 19. He sees Leviticus 19:28, but then he also sees the verse before it. The son rushes from his room to his father to show him Leviticus 19:27. He asks why he can't have a tattoo, but they both have haircuts which trim the hair on their temples and his father has rounded and trimmed his beard. The father has no response.

This is the problem with our myth for this week. None of us follow all of the Levitical Laws. We pick and choose which ones we will follow, but if we profess to follow this myth, we shouldn't pick and choose. In fact, some Christians have chosen to not pick and choose and live an orthodox Jewish way of life. The vast majority of Christians don't believe this is necessary, and I agree.

Don't get me wrong. I think there is great value from reading the Law of the Old Testament. We must remember that there are reasons that God gives Israel these Laws. We then interpret these Laws to see if they are to be taken literally or in another way in our culture. Looking at our two verses today, these types of actions were likely associated with worship of other cultures' fake gods. In order to not associate with those fake gods, Yahweh tells Israel to not make marks on their bodies like those other people do. Pray for God to help you determine how to read Scripture. Then seek out fellow Christians to discuss these issues. "As iron sharpens iron, one person sharpens the wits of another" (Prov. 27:17).

### **Wednesday, September 23 - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

As Christians, we are supposed to live a certain way. In our passage tonight, Paul speaks to this way of life as how we are to walk. Maybe translated differently in your Bible, walk is used in verses 1 and 12 to introduce and conclude this section. There are many instructions on how to live out our Christian walk within these twelve verses, so I hope you inspect your life today to determine where you are weak and where you need God's help to become stronger. I hope we can talk about these concerns tonight and grow together in our Christian walks!

### **Thursday, September 24 - Matthew 5:17-20**

I hope that the two Old Testament passages on Monday and Tuesday were enough to convince you that none of us actually believe the myth "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." But if that isn't the motto to live our lives by, what does Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17-20 mean? These verses must be interpreted by defining the word "to fulfill." What does it mean that Jesus has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets? It is this: Jesus has not come to completely disregard the Law and the Prophets. Instead, Jesus has come to bring to fruition the promises found in the Old Testament. While we talk about the free gift of salvation with Jesus, a life of Jesus is not easy. It could be said that Jesus did not abolish the law, but fulfilling the law means a commitment to him is even more rigorous than the law. Look at the rest of Matthew 5-7. There were accommodations in the Old Testament Law about what was acceptable in regards of who to love and how to retaliate. Jesus now puts more stipulations on those laws. A life with Jesus is harder than a life under the Law.

The phrase Progressive Revelation comes to mind. What is meant by that is God continues to reveal Godself throughout the Bible, and we must read the entire Bible to understand who God is. We read the Old Testament understanding the nature of God as God shows himself in the person of Jesus. This understanding of the Bible allows us

to read the Bible in a much more appropriate way than our myth for this week. We read and we ask the question: “from what I know about the nature of God through the entire Bible, especially his action on the cross, how should we interpret the passage I am reading?” And always, don’t read on your own. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you, interpret the passage, and apply it to your life. Pray for God to guide your heart and read all of the Bible because Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill.

### **Friday, September 25 - Mark 2:23-27; Luke 16:18; John 8:4-7**

Jesus didn’t believe “God said it, I believe it, that settles it,” so we shouldn’t either. The three passages we read today are examples of this fact. In Mark, Jesus corrects what is believed about the Sabbath. In Luke, Jesus strengthens the law against divorce. In John, Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery instead of stoning her as was the punishment by the Law.

I think all of what Jesus says and does on this earth is important to understand. We cannot read the John passage and think we have the freedom to sin. After all, Jesus does tell the woman in John 8:11 “do not sin again.” Jesus is not found in definitions of more conservative or more liberal. As we said yesterday, he is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. You find Jesus’ corrections to what Jews believe to be sometimes more conservative (Luke 16:18) and more liberal (Mark 2:23-27) and sometimes simply contradictory to the Old Testament (John 8:4-7). If this is how Jesus read the Scriptures, shouldn’t we read the Scriptures in the same way?

What we see in Jesus’ life is him living out what he describes as the Greatest Commandment. Love God with every fiber, ligament, and bone of your being and then love your neighbor like you love yourself. Judging what we read in the Bible and interpreting it by the greatest commandment is a great way to determine how to apply the Bible to your life. As we are getting closer to the end of this week, what are your thoughts on “God said it, I believe it, that settles it?” How could we say what we mean



better than this myth? Most if not all people who say this phrase have good intentions. So what is a better saying than this one? Write down some thoughts today and if you feel led, I'd love to hear your opinions.

### **Saturday, September 26 - Acts 15:1, 6-11**

To conclude our readings this week, let us remember the central truth that we believe about our relationship with God: we believe that a relationship with God comes through grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That is not what the Old Testament teaches, obviously. Acts 15 is a conversation between Christian leaders about what is expected of Gentile believers. Some believed that Gentiles must submit to the Law. Others believed that this requirement was not necessary. The council ultimately decided that following the Old Testament Law was not a requirement for the Gentile followers of Jesus.

This decision is what we have been discussing this week. This is why the myth is not true. We believe that all of the Bible is God-breathed. God said all of it! However, we can't read only part of what God said and say "that settles it." Instead, we read the Bible from the vantage point of the cross. We read the Old and New Testament knowing that Jesus died on the cross to take away the punishment for sin.

I asked you yesterday to write down a better phrase that we can proclaim about the Bible. Here's mine: "Humans, inspired by God, wrote it. I study it in light of the cross and discuss it with other believers. We pray for God to show us its meaning and determine a meaning using the brain God gave us. We remain open to the possibility we determined incorrectly because while the Spirit guiding us is perfect, we are not." It's not catchy, but I think it is more accurate than "God said it, I believe it, that settles it."

## **Sunday, September 27 - Psalm 65**

Psalm 65 is a thanksgiving to God for the work he is doing on this earth. On this last Sunday of September, what are you thankful that God has done for you this month?

## **MYTH 5: HATE THE SIN, LOVE THE SINNER**

### **Monday, September 28 - Matthew 7:1-5**

I saved this myth for last for a couple reasons: 1. I think it's the one most of us believe and could prove most controversial and 2. it is the myth that might be the most true. However, most true does not mean completely true. Most true means somewhat false. There are some problems with this statement and that is what we will explore through Scripture this week. Today's reading is the main issue I have with "hate the sin, love the sinner." When we say it, we are either consciously or unconsciously judging the other person as a sinner. Jesus clearly tells us to not judge people but to work on our own sin instead of seeing others as sinners. Yes, we are all sinners. Yes, we are to love everybody. But we all know that we are selective when we use this phrase. We don't say it about the man who is arrogant and prideful. We say it about the couple who is living together before they are married. Simply saying the phrase leads to judgment of others.

Think if you were in the shoes of a person who is seeking out learning more about God. You hear someone say "hate the sin, love the sinner" about you. Would you hear the word hate or love more? Instead of judging others, let's focus on our own lives, hate the sin that is in our lives, and become more like Christ every day.

## **Tuesday, September 29 - Mark 12:28-34**

Would you like a better phrase than “hate the sin, love the sinner?” How about “love your neighbor as yourself?” The scribe who asks Jesus about the greatest commandment realizes that love is more important than all of the sacrifices and offerings in the Temple. Let us be more like him.

When you are a church-goer, you start to think you are immune to “being a sinner.” The sinners are the ones getting drunk on Saturday night. Thinking of people as sinners is not “loving your neighbor as yourself.” Let’s try thinking of each other as people who God loved so much that he died for us. As you have seen from the past two days, I think this is the problem I have with this myth. It is more true than the rest of the myths, but it is just not necessary. It does more harm than good when we are witnessing to the world. Instead of thinking of each other as sinners, let’s think of each other as neighbors.

## **Wednesday, September 30 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11**

“Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” Let us not lose sight of this purpose when reading this very popular passage of 1 Thessalonians. As humans, we enjoy trying to figure things out. We want to know what is going to happen next. The purpose of this entire passage is not to tell us exactly what will happen when Jesus returns, but it is to encourage us that whether we have died or are still alive, the day of the Lord’s return will be a wonderful day for all Christians.

Be an encouragement to others today. And let’s talk more about this wonderful promise in 1 Thessalonians tonight.

## **Thursday, October 1 - 1 Timothy 1:12-17**

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Clearly, that means that God loves sinners, including you and I. God grants us mercy and allows us to believe in Jesus the Christ. That is how much God loves sinners. There is nothing wrong with telling others and ourselves to love sinners. The problem comes with the definite article “the.” When it is said that way, there is a singling out of a particular person with a particular sin. Sin is a condition of all humanity. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The message that Paul writes to Timothy in verse 15 is the message we need to move toward more than just saying “hate the sin, love the sinner.” It is a message that there is a way forward. There is a way to no longer be considered a sinner, but a redeemed child of God. The God of the universe came down to this earth, became one of us, and allowed himself to die so that we would have the opportunity to live.

Who do you know who could benefit from hearing that message today? They can change their life by accepting the grace and mercy that comes from God. Who can you share that message of love with today? Take time to pray for that person right now. It might be a family member, friend, friend’s grandchild, or your favorite cashier at the grocery store. Pray that they will be receptive to this message of love. Then, say AMEN, open your eyes, and go be the hands and feet of Jesus to spread the message of salvation with that person. “How beautiful...are the feet of those who bring good news” (Isaiah 52:7).

## **Friday, October 2 - Romans 12:9**

Wait you may say. Isn’t this passage basically saying “love the sinner, hate the sin?” Once again, this is an example of us thinking about the sin in other people’s lives instead of our own. We should read these verses as they impact our own lives instead of judging the lives of others.

There was an interview done with Billy Graham's oldest daughter Gigi back in 2005. Gigi recounts a conversation she had with her father in 1998. They had just attended a banquet in Washington D.C. for the 75th anniversary of *Time* magazine. President Bill Clinton had just been impeached of perjury and obstruction of justice stemming from his relationship with Monica Lewinsky and he was a speaker at the event. The Grahams and Clintons sat at the same table, and Billy Graham was warm and gracious toward both Bill and Hillary Clinton. As they left the banquet, Billy Graham and his daughter, Gigi, discussed the struggles the Clintons were having because of the gossip and judgment of them at that time. Billy Graham's comment on the situation was "it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge, and our job to love."

May these words provide an example for us to follow. We follow the commands of Romans 12:9, but let us hate the evil that is in our lives instead of pointing fingers at others. Let us do good, let our love be authentic, and let's do our job of loving one another without judgment.

### **Saturday, October 3 - Luke 18:9-14**

One of my goals as a Christian is to be a Christian without being obnoxious. There are so many people who I talk to about church who say they don't want to go to church because of the people. The idea that I am being a burden and stumbling block to people coming to know Jesus is a great sorrow. My goal is to not be a speed bump on the road to Jesus but an accelerator to bringing people closer to God.

A person like the Pharisee in this parable is why people don't like Christians. His prayer is all about him and that he is the holiest of the holy. Do you want to be around people like that? Do you know people like that? Are you sometimes a person like that?

This is one of the problems with our myth for this week. It sounds good, but there is a very fine line between preaching the Truth and making others think they are less

than you. Instead of “hate the sin, love the sinner,” let’s just focus on love. Let’s let God do God’s job and we will do ours. Let us not be like this judgmental pharisee.

**Sunday, October 4 - Psalm 66:1-4**

Let’s make a joyful noise to God this morning in worship! Give him the praise that he is due.