

Key Principles of Christian Living

3. *God's Bidding is God's Enabling*

In this teaching series we are looking at the key principles of the Christian life that apply to all believers everywhere. The first principle states a fundamental reality: *He's God and We're Not*. Get this and everything else in life will begin to fall into place. Skip this and nothing will work right. If you are unclear about who's God and who's not, the rest of the spiritual principles won't help you a bit. While ever you are fighting against God, your frustrations will follow you no matter how often you go to church or how often you pray or how much you give to the work of the Lord. The first principle leads us to a healthy submission where we can say from our heart, "*God, not my will but Yours be done.*"

The second principle takes us one step further: *God Doesn't Need Us - But We Desperately Need God*. The key word is *desperately* which focuses on our weakness, our sinfulness, and our total dislocation with God because of our sin. God can get along fine without us, but we couldn't live another second without God. Once we realize our true condition, we end up on our knees, acknowledging our need and praising God for His amazing grace and mercy!

And that leads us to the third principle of the Christian life: *God's Bidding is God's Enabling*. Or more simply put, God will never require anything of us which He is not ready and willing to empower and enable in us. Religion sets unachievable goals which we can never meet. The Old Covenant did the same. **Under the New Covenant, in Christ and through Christ, God empowers us to become all that He desires us to become!**

This is a wonderful word of hope for those who find themselves face down in the dust with nowhere else to turn. This principle brings us to the very heart of the gospel. If we understand this, then we know why the gospel truly is *Good News!*

Once upon a time, in a faraway place, God came to Abraham and told him to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as an offering to the Lord. Just an average day in the life of a patriarch! The words of Genesis 22:2 emphasize the close bond that existed between father and son: "*Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love.*" Now there are many questions we'd like to ask at this point, foremost among them being, why would God ask a father to sacrifice his own son? Isn't the very request a violation of God's nature? If there was a discussion between Abraham and God, or if Abraham hesitated when he heard the command, it's not recorded in the text. All we know is that the next morning Abraham took his son and his servants and set out to do exactly what the Lord required.

When they got to the region of Moriah (modern-day Jerusalem), he said to his servants, "*Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you*" (Genesis 22:5). You've got to wonder what he was thinking and how much he understood. Hebrews 11:19 indicates that he thought that God would raise his son from the dead. Somehow Abraham looked beyond the immediate circumstance and found faith to believe that the God who would take his son from him could also give him back.

As they walked along together, father and son, Isaac asked a question that must have broken Abraham's heart. "*Father, I see the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?*" With an even greater flash of insight, Abraham replied, "*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*" (Genesis 22:8).

Across the centuries, Christians have seen in these words a prefiguring of the death of Christ on the cross. There is Abraham (representing God) placing the wood (representing the Cross) upon Isaac (representing Jesus Christ). It is the father offering his son freely and without complaint, just as God the Father offered Jesus for the sins of the whole world. Somehow Abraham understood something far deeper than this event. When he said, *“God himself will provide the lamb,”* he was pointing not simply toward the altar on Mount Moriah, but to a greater sacrifice to be offered at the very same location almost 2,000 years later when God provided the Ultimate Lamb - Jesus Christ - for the sin of the whole world. Whether Abraham was conscious of this or not is unknown, but he was certainly part of a very powerful prophetic event.

When they reached the right spot, Abraham built an altar of stones and placed the wood on top of it. Then he bound Isaac and placed him on the wood. I don't know what words passed between father and son at this point, but I doubt that much was said. What does a father say to his son in a moment like that? What does a son who loves and trusts his father say as his hands and feet are bound?

Then came the moment of truth. Abraham raised his hand and prepared to plunge the knife into the breast of his son. At that very moment, not one second sooner and not one second later, God spoke to Abraham: *“Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son”* (Genesis 22:12).

Again, the timing is crucial. As Abraham looked up, he saw a ram caught by its horns in a nearby thicket. I am sure he ran to get that ram before it freed itself and got away. With the same knife that he would have used to take his son's life, he slit the ram's throat, drained the blood, set the wood on fire, and offered the ram on the altar to the Lord. Only one detail remains. Abraham called the place *“The Lord will provide.”* The traditional English rendering of the Hebrew is *Jehovah Jireh*. Abraham meant, *“Here is the place where God saw my need and provided the ram to meet my need.”*

As we read this story, it's easy to focus on Abraham's amazing faith. But the real hero of the story isn't Abraham. The real hero is God! As great as Abraham was, God was even greater. He gave Abraham a seemingly impossible demand and then he provided what Abraham lacked - a morally righteous way to meet that demand. God did what only God could do. He supplied what Abraham needed to fulfill God's will. What God wanted all along was not the death of Isaac but Abraham's unquestioning submission and obedience. But it had to happen the way it did in order for Abraham to demonstrate his faith and for God to demonstrate His grace.

That happened early in the history of the Old Testament. Several hundred years passed and then God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the law that would guide the people of Israel. If you have read Leviticus, you know that God gave Moses instructions regarding various offerings and sacrifices. Blood, death and sacrifice then dominated the life of God's people for centuries – but all this was meant to point to something else – to God's ultimate plan. From the very beginning, God was always looking towards something better. Hebrews 10:1 tells us that the law was a “shadow” of good things to come.

In a sense, the entire sacrificial system was meant to prepare the Jews for the day when John the Baptist saw Jesus and exclaimed, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). What an amazing statement that is.

First of all, He is God's Lamb sent from heaven to earth. If we offer a sacrifice, the best we can do is to offer a literal lamb or a goat or to round up a bull and bring it to the priest. Animal blood was all we could offer. When God offers a lamb, that 'lamb' is His own Son. He is the perfect sacrifice. All those animals the priests put to death were meant to point directly to Christ.

Secondly, He is God's lamb offered for our sins. The word translated "takes away" is used elsewhere for the rolling away of the stone that sealed the tomb of Jesus. When our Lord died on the cross, He "rolled away" our sins once and for all.

Thirdly, He is God's lamb who rolls away the sins of the whole world. Here's an amazing truth. The blood of Jesus is so powerful that it is sufficient payment for the sins of the whole world. Anyone, anywhere, at any time is forgiven through Christ. There are no barriers that stand between you and eternal life. Jesus paid it all. From the godliest person to the vilest – Christ secured forgiveness for the whole world! Why? Why does God do this? Well, there is something in God that causes Him to provide whatever we need to meet His righteous requirements and that "something" is grace. Let me make this very simple: Here is the whole gospel in three simple statements. Are you ready? If anyone asks you what the gospel is, try telling them this: God said, "*Do this.*" We said, "*We can't.*" God said, "*I know. I will do it for you.*"

God requires perfection because God is perfect. We cannot meet that standard. So, God sent His Son to live that perfect life on our behalf and to die the death we deserved. God requires payment for sin because God is holy. We cannot make that payment without ceasing to exist which was never an option for a God Who loves us and created us to be in fellowship with Him for eternity. So, God sent His Son to pay that price in full on our behalf.

God requires righteousness. But all we have to offer are the filthy rags of our soiled self-righteousness. So, God sent His Son Who took our sin so that we might be clothed with His perfect righteousness. God requires a blood sacrifice for sin. But we cannot meet that demand and stay alive. So, He sent His Son to die in our place, shedding His blood, paying the price, bearing our burden, offering Himself as the final sacrifice for all sin – past, present, and future.

Without blood, without death, without sacrifice, no one can come into God's presence. But we weren't even qualified to die for ourselves, much less for anyone else. We weren't perfect, or pure, or unblemished. Sin had marred every part of us. If God doesn't do something for us, we are sunk. His holiness demanded a perfect sacrifice. His love sent us His Son. In this we see the glory of the gospel. God says, "*You must.*" We say, "*We can't.*" God says, "*I will.*" And He sent His Son from heaven to earth to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. This is why the Bible says what we have sung often: "*salvation belongs to our God.*"

Everything starts and ends with God. Salvation doesn't start on earth and rise to heaven. It starts in the kingdom of heaven and comes to earth through Christ. God takes the initiative. God makes it happen. While you were dead in your sin, God made you alive in Christ. That's why the most famous verse in the Bible begins with the words: "*For God so loved the world that He gave ...*" (John 3:16).

You'll never understand why Jesus came until you grasp the meaning of those words. Jesus is God's gift to the whole human race - entirely undeserved. A gift given in spite our sin. A gift many despised and rejected. A gift that was brutally crucified. But even His crucifixion was part of the gift from God. Through His death came our eternal life.

God knew we were dead in our sins, so He sent Christ to give us life.

God knew we were His enemies, so He sent Christ to make us His friends.

God knew we were like orphans, so He sent Christ to bring us into His family.

God knew we had no hope, so He sent Christ to give us a home in heaven.

God knew we were poor, so He sent Christ to make us rich.

God knew we were enslaved, so He sent Christ to set us free.

God knew we were afraid to die, so He sent Christ to die and then raised Him from the dead.

God knew we had nothing, so He gave us everything in Christ.

What He required from us, He gave to us. What we needed, He provided. His bidding was His enabling. But wait, there's more ... no steak knives ... something much better ...

God knew we needed guidance, so He gave us the Bible.

God knew we needed wisdom and power, so He gave us the Holy Spirit.

God knew we needed encouragement, so He gave us brothers and sisters in the church.

God placed us *"in Christ."* At this point all those great words of the gospel come into play: words like: salvation, forgiveness, grace, mercy, love, peace, hope, eternal life, redemption, substitution, propitiation, reconciliation, adoption, justification, regeneration, and glorification.

All of this is given to us *freely* in Christ. New life. New hope. New heart. New mind. New standing. New position. New name. New power. New direction. New destiny. All of it is ours, all of it is free, all of it comes to us as a gift from God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Religion says, *"Do this and live."*

God says, *"I have done it all for you – now receive it in faith and really live!"*

And right there you find the whole gospel in a nutshell: It's do vs. done. As simple as that. All religion is based on 'do' – on works. You go to heaven because of what you do: Give money. Go to church or to the synagogue or the mosque. Pray toward Mecca. Light a candle. Pray all night. Keep the feast days. Give alms to the poor. Offer a sacrifice. Keep the Ten Commandments. Be baptized. Follow the Golden Rule. Be a good neighbour. Don't get in trouble. Obey the law. Stay out of jail. Be courteous, kind and forgiving. Try harder. Do your best. Follow the program. Live a good life ...

In looking at that list, it's important to note that many of those things are good and right and noble. There's nothing wrong with them. But the problem with the 'do more, try harder' mantra of religion is that you can never be sure you've done enough or tried hard enough! And if somehow you finally manage to do enough, how do you know that you won't blow it all tomorrow by one stupid sin?

Religion is evil. God hates religion. Religion is what held God's children captive until Jesus came in the flesh and smashed religion and drove out the religious spirits. The Christian faith is built upon the foundation of grace alone. Sometimes you will hear the phrase "free grace" but that is a nonsense statement. It's like saying "wet water." As opposed to what? Dry water? **If it's not free, it's not grace.**

If you have to *do* something, anything at all, to earn it or merit it or deserve it, it's not grace! The whole difference comes down to this: Christianity is based on what Christ has done for us – before we were even born – before we committed our first sin – before we even knew Christ existed. Religion is based on what we ourselves do.

Let me make the point even sharper here with a question. Are you satisfied with what Jesus did for you on the cross? If you are, then all you have to do is rest on Him for your eternal salvation and rest in Him for an abundant, fruitful life. If you are not satisfied with what Jesus did, then you will end up trying to do something to add to His finished work on the cross. That is when religion is birthed in you and that is why it's so evil and arrogant, because the truth is, **God is satisfied with what Jesus did.** Religion tells us that we have to do more to add to what Jesus did. Jesus said, *"It is finished."* Religion says, *"but there's more to do .. and we have to do it!* So, is Jesus enough to take you to heaven or do you think you've got to add something to what He did?

Let me finish by explaining what all this means: Because of the work of Christ, we now have full forgiveness for all our sins. Not only that, we have the assurance that when we leave this world, we will be fully in heaven.

We can say with confidence that even the worst sinner is a recipient of God's amazing grace. The door to heaven has been opened by the death of God's Son. Everyone comes through that one door marked "*Enter by grace alone.*"

How then shall we live? Well, if God has provided all that we need, then we must reach out and receive all that He offers – every day! If we have truly experienced God's grace, then we will respond with profound gratitude. God has done it all. He has made a way for lost sinners to be forgiven. He found us, He saved us. He redeemed us. He gave us new life, and He ushered us into heaven. When that truth really hits our hearts, we will give thanks to God every single day.

Brothers and sisters, I beg you in Jesus' name: come to the cross. Lay hold of the riches that are yours in Christ Jesus. Lay aside the rags of your own righteousness and receive the pure white robes of the righteousness of Christ. Hold out your hands and He will fill them with every spiritual blessing. All that God has promised is yours for the asking. Would you like the water of life? Come and drink all you like. It's yours and it's free, flowing from the throne of grace. Think of what is yours through Christ:

He forgives with no payment whatsoever.

He forgives all our sins once and for all.

He promises complete reconciliation.

He gives you assurance of your salvation.

He makes you His son, His daughter.

He places you in Christ.

He gives you access to God 24 hours a day.

He gives you a new heart and a new life.

He gives you a home in heaven.

He promises to raise you from the dead.

He promises that you will be like Him.

He promises you will reign with Him.

All of this is yours *in Christ*. Does that not lift your spirit? Does that not make you want to sing? Does that not make you want to dance? Remember this truth. What God requires - God supplies. God's bidding is God's enabling. All that we need, we find in Christ.

Praise God for His amazing grace!