

# Themes of the Bible

## Calvary Bible Church, Midway, Arkansas

As we read the Bible, we notice that throughout God's word certain important themes are repeatedly mentioned or implied.

### Faithfulness

God reveals Himself in the Bible as One who can be fully trusted. He exhibits complete integrity in all He says and promises; consequently His people are to have complete confidence in His promises concerning them (see Num. 23:19; Is. 55:11). Studying the faithfulness of God will bring about spiritual stability and confidence in a believer's daily walk.

### Love

In the Old Testament the verb "to love" (Heb. *ahab*) and its related words cover the full range of meanings the English word "love" has, including love for God (Ex. 20:6; Ps. 40:16) and the love God has for his people (Deut. 7:13; Hos. 3:1). The Old Testament also uses the Hebrew word *chesed* specifically for the covenant love the Lord has for His people, referring to His steadfastness or loyalty.

In the New Testament the primary Greek verbs expressing the concept of love are *agapao* □, loving as an act of will, and *phileo* □, loving as a response to a person or object. In the synoptic Gospels, one notes that the primary use of the word "love" is with regard to the great commandment (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:26–28). Love is a possibility only because the believer has responded in faith to God's saving act in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 5:8; see Gal. 2:20).

### Justice

Justice is founded in the being of God and is an extension of His holiness. God is shown to be a sure defender of the poor and the oppressed (Ps. 10:17, 18; Jer. 9:23, 24). The Psalms base justice on God's role as the sovereign creator of the universe (Ps. 99:1–4), so the idea extends beyond the nation of Israel (Ps. 9:7–9; see Dan. 4:27). In view of God's concern for the poor and the weak, a corresponding quality is expected from God's people (Deut. 10:18, 19). When they properly carry out justice, they are agents of the divine will (Is. 59:15, 16; 2 Cor. 9:8–10). God's demand for justice is so central that other responses to Him are empty or diminished if they exist without it (Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; Matt. 23:23). Paul (primarily in Romans) uses the language of justice to describe God's work of salvation as he expounds the righteousness of God.

### Judgment

In the Old Testament God appears frequently in the role of "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25), or more generally the "God of justice" (Mal. 2:17). Judgment implies not only an unbiased weighing of good and evil, but also vigorous action against evil. It is because of this understanding that the people of God are summoned to exercise judgment in turn (Is. 1:17;

Zech. 8:16). It is a strongly personal notion, closely linked to God's characteristics of mercy, lovingkindness, righteousness, and truth.

The New Testament continues to stress judgment as part of God's nature and essential activity (Rom. 1:18; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; Rev. 16:5). His judgments are not confined to the future but are already at work in the present age (John 8:50; Rom. 1:18, 22, 24, 26, 28; Rev. 18:8). Judgment is associated even now with Christ, who exercises the Father's judgments.

## Mercy

Just as strong as the emphasis on judgment is the Bible's recognition of God's mercy. By His grace God extends help and forgiveness to sinners who deserve only condemnation, as well as practical help to those who are suffering under life's burdens. God shows compassion toward those who have broken His law (Dan. 9:9; 1 Tim. 1:13, 16), although such mercy is selectively bestowed upon the undeserving (Rom. 9:14–18). God's mercy extends beyond withheld punishment (Eph. 2:4–6) to include the blessings of salvation.

Jesus showed mercy toward the afflicted when he healed them, as in the case of blind men (Matt. 9:27–31; 20:29–34) and lepers (Luke 17:11–19). Jesus was modeling the behavior He expects from His followers: because God is merciful, He expects us to be merciful as well (Matt. 5:7; James 1:27).

## Truth

The Hebrew idea of truth is generally associated with constancy, permanence, faithfulness, and reliability. God above all is true, that is, real and reliable (Is. 65:16; Jer. 10:10); His people are to seek God's truth (Ps. 25:5; 51:6; 86:11) and judge truly. The lack of truth is lamented (Is. 59:14, 15; Zech. 8:16).

For the Hebrews, truth was basically moral and relational, not simply intellectual. For the Greeks, the emphasis of truth was intellectual rather than a matter of trust or reliance. The New Testament usage draws on both understandings. The word is found mainly in Paul's writings and in John's Gospel and letters. John builds on the understanding that God is true or real (John 3:33; 7:28). Christ reveals God and thus reveals truth (John 8:26, 40; 18:37). Christ is full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 17), He is "the truth" (John 14:6; see John 1:9; 15:1), and He sends the Spirit of truth (John 15:26). Paul teaches that truth is to be obeyed (Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7), that it proves reliable (2 Cor. 7:14; 11:10), and that its opposite is malice and evil (1 Cor. 5:8). The Greek idea of truth as correct knowledge appears most clearly in Paul's pastoral letters. One is to know the truth (1 Tim. 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25) and avoid false beliefs (2 Tim. 2:18; 4:4).

## Holiness

In Hebrew, to be holy primarily means to be separate from the ordinary or profane. God is holy, and people, things, and actions may be holy by association with God. Psalms and Isaiah frequently refer to God as the Holy One (Ps. 78:41; 89:18; Is. 1:4; 5:19; 30:15). Places where God appeared and was customarily worshiped were also holy (see Gen. 28:11–22; Ex. 3:5). The temple in Jerusalem was the most holy place in Israel because God's presence dwelled there (1 Kin. 8:10, 11); consequently, persons and things relating to the temple were holy (Lev. 22; 27).

Israel itself was a holy nation (Ex. 19:4; Lev. 19:2; Deut. 7:6) because the Lord set it apart for His purposes.

The New Testament reaffirms the ideas of holiness found in Judaism. God, the temple, and the law are all holy. The physical temple is deemphasized because Gentile Christians had moved away from the practice of Judaism and because the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, but the temple occurs as a metaphor for Christian holiness (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19). God is addressed as “Holy Father” by Jesus (John 17:11), praised in heaven by the threefold “holy” of Isaiah (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:6–10), and addressed by the petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be Your name” (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2).

## Missions

God has always used His people to proclaim His mighty deeds and saving grace. The nation of Israel was to declare the goodness of God to the Gentiles so that they might enter into covenant with God. The Book of Isaiah is filled with declarations regarding the salvation of the Gentiles (Is. 11:10; 42:6; 49:6; 60:11).

It was not until the advent of the church that the good news of God’s salvation in Christ was being proclaimed widely in the world. Jesus commands His people to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). It is through “the foolishness of the message preached” (1 Cor. 1:21) that people are drawn to faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is of God, but He uses His people as the means by which He saves sinners.