

Frequently Asked Questions

*Volume 3 of a Thirteen Lesson Bible Study
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Introduction

This series of Bible studies originated as a series of articles in the *Woodmont Beacon*, the bulletin of the Woodmont church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. The articles have been reproduced here as a class text and questions have been appended to facilitate a consideration of questions that often arise among believers and seekers alike.

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Lesson 1: *Is Circumcision a Sin?*

Circumcision is an extremely common, sometimes controversial, medical procedure in this era, but thousands of years ago it was an important part of the covenant between God and man. Sometimes the teaching of the New Testament regarding circumcision is misunderstood and the former symbol seems sinful. Is circumcision a sin?

Well, it certainly seems so at first glance: “If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing: (Galatians 5:2). Yet, the man who wrote this was himself a circumcised Jewish Christian (Philippians 3:5), who recommended that his associate, Timothy, be circumcised before beginning his ministry (Acts 16:3). Either Paul is contradicting himself, or the context of that prohibition in Galatians limits its scope.

In that epistle, Paul is writing to an audience whom the Judaizing teachers were trying to influence to heed the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses included circumcision as a test of fellowship and also mandated Sabbath observance and other rituals. The Holy Spirit had made clear repeatedly, however, that the Law of Moses, in its entirety, had been abolished at the cross. This is the import of Ephesians 2:14-22 and Colossians 2:8-23. Circumcision and the Sabbath are included specifically in the latter passage and are not required of converts to Christ at all.

So, in Galatians 5, Paul is telling his readers that if they become circumcised as *a religious requirement or submission to a graceless law*, Christ will profit them nothing for grace will be nullified in their lives. Circumcision as a medical procedure, commonly performed on male babies long before the eighth day now, is not in any way a religious ritual or homage to Moses. Medical circumcision is certainly allowed for it does not violate the context and meaning of Galatians 5.

Questions For Discussion

1. Without getting too graphic, what is circumcision? What surgical instrument did Joshua use for circumcision (Joshua 5:2-9)?

2. Read through Genesis 17. What was the original purpose of circumcision? What were its details (cf. Exodus 12:48-49)?

3. How did Zipporah feel about circumcision (Exodus 4:24-31)

4. We know that Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:21), but how does he treat the matter concerning fellowship in his church? Specifically, does he or an apostle mandate that non-Jews must first become circumcised proselytes and then his disciples (Colossians 2:11-17 and First Corinthians 7:17-20)?

5. Whose bright idea was it to mandate such circumcisions for Gentile converts to the cross (Acts 15:1-5, cf. Matthew 23:15)?

6. How did Paul respond when some saints in Galatia considered approving the practice (Galatians 3:1-2, 5:1-12)?

7. Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised, but not Titus (Acts 16:1-5, Galatians 2:1-5)?

8. What would make circumcision sinful today? Is it always sinful?

Lesson 2: *Is Interracial Marriage A Sin?*

The world seems to be getting smaller and America's claim to be a cultural melting pot proves truer every year. Interracial marriages, once extremely uncommon here and still taboo in many other nations, are no longer an oddity in any part of America. Because of some Old Testament history, however, the question arises: "Is interracial marriage a sin?"

If your name is something like Azariah and you are a Jew living in 1000 B.C. Israel, it most certainly is. Before entering Canaan, the Jews were warned, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess ... You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son" (Deuteronomy 7:1-3). Gentiles, however, were free to marry non-Jews under the original authority of Genesis 2:18-25. All Gentiles, whether they were fair-skinned or dark, were at liberty to marry one another in the Lord.

Under the New Testament of Christ, the only racial distinction that ever existed in God's sight—Gentile or Jew—was abolished at the cross (Ephesians 2:14-18). That barrier to Jewish interaction and intermarriage with Gentiles was done away with. The question persists today though, not about Jews and Gentiles, but about blacks and whites, Asians and Indians, Filipinos and Australoids. Is interracial marriage a sin?

First, so much interracial mating has occurred, especially in America, that it is difficult to find many pure-blood people without at least some Anglo *and* Indian blood in their veins. Second, Gentile people were always authorized to marry within the Gentile race, whether they be fair-skinned or dark, through Genesis 2:18-25. That authority was positively renewed by Christ in Matthew 19:4-6.

There is no parallel between the black/white relationships of today and the Gentile/Jew ones of the Old Testament. Many have based their opposition to interracial marriage on this fact, but it is shortsighted and self-serving sophistry.

Because Gentile marriage has always been approved, there is no scriptural basis for opposing the unions of blacks and whites, Asians and Indians, etc. Moreover, there is not even ground today for opposing the weddings of Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 3:28).

Questions For Discussion

1. Consider God's original marriage law in Genesis 2:18-25. Why doesn't it say anything about interracial marriage?

2. From what three men are all of the people of the Earth descended (Genesis 9:18-19)? What does that tell us about the issue of race (cf. Acts 17:26)?

3. The Semitic bloodline continues through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the last is renamed Israel. His 12 sons become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, the nation that takes root in Egypt with divine designs on Canaan. What is God's warning as Israel prepares to invade the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)?

4. Did Moses thus sin by marrying an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1-3)? Explain your answer.

5. Is there any Old Testament prohibition against Gentiles marrying other Gentiles interracially? Why is the doctrine of Deuteronomy 7:1-6 not binding upon Christians today (Acts 10:34-35, Ephesians 2:11-19)?

6. Interracial marriage has nothing inherent to violate the ideals of Genesis Second or the update in Matthew 19, yet it is opposed violently in some cultures even today. Jesus Christ, however, is intimately involved in a very broad "interracial marriage." Identify it (John 3:27-30, Ephesians 2:11-22, 5:25-28, Galatians 3:26-29).

Lesson 3: *Is There Really A Devil?*

Surveys are done annually to gauge the conviction of the American people about the reality of God and the devil. Surprisingly, a majority of them continue to proclaim a belief in both. The numbers, however, are not identical, for some who believe in God ask, “Is there really a devil?”

Is he an actual spirit personage or is “Satan” just a figurative embodiment of evil attitudes in the world? In reality, there is just no way to believe in the God of the Bible without believing in its devil as well. If Jehovah is God and the Bible is his inspired word, the devil it describes must be of the nature that he details. That nature is decidedly not figurative, but overwhelmingly literal.

We first meet him in the Garden of Eden, one of God’s free-will creatures choosing to do evil and share the moment with others (Genesis 3). The serpent is punished for tempting Adam and Eve, but continues to spread wickedness. He is present behind the scenes of Job’s life, belittling the patriarch’s faith and attacking its credibility. When pitted against genuine conviction, Satan is a miserable loser.

That is never more accurate than when he speaks with Jesus at the commencement of his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Satan has ministers (Second Corinthians 11:15) and messengers (Second Corinthians 12:7) and power (Second Thessalonians 2:9). His appetite is comparable to that of a roaring lion (First Peter 5:8).

As the account of Job’s life makes clear, Satan is not omnipotent and Christ rejoiced when he saw the adversary’s power decline as grace progressed (John 12:31, Luke 10:18). Michael the archangel rebuked him (Jude 9), but the father of lies and sinner from the beginning persisted in evil (John 8:44, First John 3:8). Thus, Hell is not his kingdom, but as much his eternal prison as those whom he overwhelmed with temptation (Revelation 20:1-10). There is no doubt that the Bible portrays the devil as real, but not invincible. Faith is always the victory that overcomes (First John 5:4).

Questions For Discussion

1. Where in the Bible does the reader first meet the devil? What are the circumstances? What is the outcome?

2. Is Satan an immortal being like God or is he a creature of God like the angels (First Timothy 6:16, Second Timothy 1:10)? If God created Satan, was he created to be evil (Genesis 1:31)?

3. Consider Isaiah 14:3-21 and Ezekiel 28:1-19. Do these passages describe the creation or fall of the devil or something else? Explain. Who is Lucifer?

4. How do the first and second chapters of the book of Job present Satan as a real person? What else do we learn about the power and nature of Satan (cf. First Corinthians 10:12-13, First Peter 5:8)?

5. Consider the temptations of Christ in Matthew 4:1-11. If Satan is only an energy, negative force or myth, what happens to the reliability of the Bible in light of the way this passage depicts him?

6. Who are Satan's ministers and messengers (Second Corinthians 11:14-15, 12:7; John 8:44)? Is Hell his kingdom where he reigns forever over the damned (Second Peter 2:4-9, Revelation 20:1-10)?

7. What might happen to people who deny the reality of Satan?

Lesson 4: *Do Saved Go Directly To Heaven?*

Man's greatest hope is to enter Heaven upon his exit from this world and many are the not-quite-dead tales of lighted tunnels and warm glows. Yet, if the saved go directly to Heaven upon their deaths, what is the point of the resurrection? Do the saved go directly to Heaven?

Judging from many of the funerals we have attended and the words of suffering loved ones we have overheard, most believe that pretty much everybody goes straight to Heaven upon their deaths. It is comforting to believe the dearly departed is in "a better place" and "his suffering is over."

That sweet notion, however, ignores what the Bible says about the second coming of Christ. Consider First Thessalonians 4:13-18. The Holy Spirit clearly indicates a resurrection of the righteous dead so that they then can be with Christ in the clouds forever. Should we understand that they would be resurrected out of Heaven, only to reenter Heaven immediately? What would be the point? The fact that the second coming of Christ includes a resurrection of the dead indicates the existence of an intermediate realm between physical death and the Lord's return.

Jesus himself described this realm in Luke 16. Between verses 19 and 31, two men die but neither goes to Heaven or Hell. Both travel to a place called Hades, which has two sections. Lazarus, who lived righteously, was taken by the angels to Abraham's bosom on the side of comforting reward (or "Paradise," cf. Luke 23:43). The rich man who had lived selfishly was sent to the side of torment. A great fixed gulf separated them, even as life on Earth continued without them. This Hadean realm is not Catholic purgatory, for there is no expatriation in Hades.

Peter likewise described the intermediate spiritual state between death and the second coming. He used the word "Tartarus" to indicate where dead sinners are reserved for the day of judgment (Second Peter 2:4, 9-11). So, neither the saved nor sinner goes directly to Heaven or Hell until the resurrection.

Questions For Discussion

1. Between what two circumstances was Paul hard-pressed (Philippians 1:19-26)?

2. What was the path taken by Christ between Earth and Heaven (Luke 23:43, Acts 2:22-28)?

3. What phrase that is similar to “depart to be with Christ” does Paul use in First Thessalonians 4:14? Explain this phrase.

4. Jesus told at least one audience the story of the rich man and Lazarus. (Luke 16:19-31) Although some argue this must have been a parable, that would do nothing to make the details into mere fantasy. Describe the fate of each of the characters in the story.

5. How does Peter describe the other section of Hades that is surely not any kind of Paradise (Second Peter 2:4-11)? Bonus: Find the Greek word that is translated *hell* in verse four.

6. The Bible speaks repeatedly of a “Judgment Day,” (Matthew 11:16-24, Second Thessalonians 1:3-10, Second Peter 3:10-14) but what happens to this notion if souls go directly to heaven or hell upon death?

7. Final judgment clearly follows the general resurrection of every soul that has ever lived (Revelation 20:11-15). In the interim between death and judgment, is there a purgatorial hope for those in torment to cross over to Abraham’s side (Hebrews 9:27-28, Luke 16:24-26)? Explain.

Lesson 5: *When Is Jesus Coming Back?*

For those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, there is no sweeter thought than being reunited with him. In every generation, millions wonder, “When is Jesus coming back?”

At his ascension, “two men stood by [the disciples] and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:10-11).

Yes, but when?! The question resonated throughout the New Testament. The church at Thessalonica become so convinced that Christ’s return –his *Parousia*–was imminent that they forsook the elements of daily life simply to wait. And they waited and waited while less impulsive brethren felt compelled to feed and provide for them. Finally, the apostle Paul wrote and disabused them of the notion that Christ’s return was definitely imminent. As Jesus predicted, his second coming would be “as a thief in the night” (First Thessalonians 5:2), without the kind of warning events that preceded the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-35).

In a second epistle, Paul confessed that the Lord Jesus would be revealed from heaven on the Day of Judgment (1:3-10), but only after “the man of sin is revealed” (2:3-4). The day of Christ had not yet come (2:2); therefore, those idle, hopeful saints needed to get back to work (3:6-15).

When Jesus commented on his eventual return, he contrasted its circumstances with those of the fall of Jerusalem. In the case of his return, there would be no signs, for “of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my father only” (Matthew 24:36). The wars and rumors of wars and other signs all occurred in the seventh decade of the first century and pointed to the coming Roman desolation of Jerusalem. They have nothing to do with the second coming.

While Scripture sets no date and offers no signs, certain things did have to occur before the second coming even became possible. Essentially, the prophets foresaw a great widespread apostasy, evidenced by a man of sin who is served as if he were God and the presence of antichrist teaching in the church (First John 2:18-19). Such apostasy is clearly in the world already and antichrist teaching is present likewise.

We sometimes sing, “Jesus is coming soon, morning or night or noon” but in reality we have no indication at all that he is coming soon. The Watchtower folks and other Premillennial thinkers have pretty much given up on trying to set the date after so many notable failures. Their predecessors were off in 1874, the Watchtower missed out on 1914 and dozens of preachers were disappointed by Y2K. We simply cannot know when Jesus will return. The result is that we must always be prepared to meet him in the clouds (Matthew 25, Second Corinthians 5:9-11).

Questions For Discussion

1. Define *Parousia*.

2. How did Jesus depart in the first place (Acts 1:9-11)?

3. What information did Jesus give about *when* he would be returning after his ascension into Heaven (Matthew 24:1-3, 34-37)?

4. To what does Jesus compare his return (Matthew 24:38-44)? What is the lesson then (Matthew 24:45-51, Matthew 25:1-1-46, Second Corinthians 5:9-11)?

5. While it is obviously good to look forward to his return, early Christians illustrate the problems with preoccupation with the *Parousia*. Identify them:

- First Thessalonians 4:13-5:11:
- Second Thessalonians 2:1-4:
- Second Thessalonians 3:6-12:

6. What did Paul argue was necessary before Jesus could possibly return (Second Thessalonians 2:1-12, First Timothy 4:1-5)?

Lesson 6: *Should I Remember The Sabbath?*

Exodus 20:8-10 reads: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work.” The Sabbath was an important part of the old law and one that first century Jews clung to sentimentally and avidly. Some today continue to ask, “Should I still remember the Sabbath?”

First, the Sabbath was an integral part, but only a part, of a larger code of law, the Law of Moses. That code was given solely to the nation of Israel and her proselytes in the pre-Christian covenant, which they failed to keep (Exodus 31:13-17). It was a perpetual covenant, but only with one nation and only so long as it remained in force (Exodus 31:16-17). The Aaronic priesthood was also to be perpetual, but was terminated in favor of the Christian priesthood when the covenant was fulfilled (Exodus 40:15, Hebrews 7:11-13, First Peter 2:9-10).

After Israel’s failure, the entire covenant, including those 10 commandments that were engraved on stones, lost its glory (Second Corinthians 3:7-11) and was abolished at the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:14-15, Colossians 2:13-14). The obsolescence of the old law, including the Hebrews’ Sabbath observance, became clearer in the decades that followed the cross, as converts were made from Gentile families (Hebrews 8:13). The Sabbath of the old law was never enjoined upon them. Paul wrote, “So let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16).

Modern Sabbatarians keep the Sabbath in name only; that is, they worship on Saturdays, but they do not obey the tenets of the Sabbath from the Law of Moses. For example, in Numbers 28:1-10, God enjoined animal sacrifice upon Israel as part of her Sabbath observance. All work on the Sabbath was strictly forbidden and those who did work were to be stoned to death (Exodus 35:13, Numbers 15:32-36). Modern Sabbatarians only worship on Saturdays; they do not make animal sacrifices or stone offenders and therefore, they do not literally keep the Sabbath at all.

Nine of the 10 commandments are reissued as part of the New Testament; only the Sabbath is not. Instead, the first day of the week is set aside as a day of worship because it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 28, Acts 20). It is not the Christian Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day and it is from God.

Questions For Discussion

1. Why did Jesus keep the Sabbath? Does that prove we should keep it?
2. What *exactly* is the Sabbath? To whom was it given (Exodus 31:13-17)?
3. Some point to the fact that it was meant to be part of a perpetual covenant and hold that the Sabbath must be observed today. What other perpetual code was perpetual only during the duration of the Old Testament (Exodus 40:15, Hebrews 7:11-13, First Peter 2:9-10)?
4. What is the current status of the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-19, Ephesians 2:14-15, Colossians 2:13-14, Hebrews 8:13)? Does this include the 10 Commandments, of which the Sabbath is but one (Second Corinthians 3:7-11)? Is Sabbath-keeping a test of fellowship (Colossians 2:16)?
5. What exactly was involved in “keeping the Sabbath” (Numbers 28:1-10, Exodus 35:13, Numbers 15:32-36)? Was it only rest and a sermon or was there more? Do modern Sabbatarians actually “keep the Sabbath”?
6. Although Paul found a ready audience in the synagogues on Sabbaths, when did the early church assemble for its worship (Acts 20:7-11, First Corinthians 16:1-4)? What is special about that day of the week?

Lesson 7: *What Is The Purpose of Baptism?*

Ask this question and the world will give you conflicting answers: What is the purpose of baptism?

Some say it is an outward sign of an inwardly felt grace while others contend it is just a symbolic church ritual in which parents dedicate their babies to God. The problem with such responses is that they lack any scriptural foundation. No Scripture relegates baptism to mere ritual. Furthermore, there is no evidence that babies were ever sprinkled, poured or immersed into an unwitting, unwilling relationship with God.

Let the Scriptures speak for themselves: What is the purpose of baptism?

- To make one a disciple: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
- To seek salvation: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).
- To gain forgiveness of sins: “Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
- To call for cleansing: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).
- To be united with Christ: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3)?
- To put on Christ: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).
- To save us: “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism” (First Peter 3:21).

When the creeds and prejudices that result are stripped away, it becomes clear what the Bible answers on the purpose of water baptism.

Questions For Discussion

1. Where does baptism take off in the New Testament (Luke 3:1-14)?

2. Was Jesus baptized (John 1:29-34)? Why? Did Jesus personally baptize his disciples (John 3:22-26, 4:1-4)?

3. What is necessary for a baptism (John 3:23)?

4. Some see baptism as a church ritual, sometimes involving a baby and a font from which sprinkles of water are obtained. Others have determined that baptism is necessary only as an outward sign of an inward feeling. Consider the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. What parts of the story differ from these human perspectives on baptism.

5. What was John's baptism for (Mark 1:4)? Is it still in effect today (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 18:24-19:7)?

6. What did Peter say the baptism of Christ was for (Acts 2:38)? How does that harmonize with what Jesus had taught (Mark 16:15-16)?

7. Compare baptism to a change of position (Romans 6:1-7, Galatians 3:27).

8. How is baptism an appeal (Acts 22:12-16, First Peter 3:18-22)?

Lesson 8: *Will Only 144,000 Be In Heaven?*

Having read Revelation and a few Watchtower Society propaganda publications, someone asks, “Will only 144,000 people be saved in Heaven?”

Premillennialism is an interpretation of Revelation and other passages that places the reign of Jesus on David’s throne in the future. He will literally reign over the world from the city of Jerusalem. This interpretation is false, as the events of Revelation were confined to a time in the near future when written in the first century (Revelation 1:1-3).

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society goes a step further by deeming the group in Revelation known as the 144,000 to be a literal, limited number who will reign with God in heaven. This interpretation, if followed logically and consistently presents a number of problems, however.

If the 144,000 is a literal number and not symbolic of something else, then everything about it must also be literal, if we are to remain consistent. That means that every person in the 144,000 must:

- **be an Israelite** (Revelation 7:1-8 clearly identifies the population of this group as coming from the nation of Israel. No one of a Gentile heritage can have any part in heaven under this interpretation.)
- **be evenly divided among the twelve tribes** (Revelation 7:1-8 draws exactly 12,000 people from each tribe. Once a certain tribe has sent all its delegates into heaven, the rest are without hope. If one tribe could not send 12,000 righteous people, some wicked would have to fill the vacancy, one supposes.)
- **actually reign on Earth, not in Heaven** (Watchtower theology says the 144,000 will assemble to reign in heaven, but Revelation 14:1 clearly puts them on Earth, with Jesus.)
- **have the name Yahweh written on their heads** (Revelation 14:1 also says the 144,000 will have God’s name inscribed on their foreheads. If this is literal, they must literally walk about with God’s name written above their eyes.)
- **be virgins** (Revelation 14:4 identifies them as not being defiled with women. No married person will ever reach Heaven.)
- **be men** (Revelation 14:4 says the 144,000 were redeemed from among men. No women will ever see Heaven under a consistent reckoning of the Watchtower philosophy.)

The 144,000 is actually a symbolic number, drawn from the Oriental numerology in vogue as John wrote. It is the product of the square of the number for organized religion (12), multiplied by the number for ultimate completeness (1000). This symbol represents all those who refused the

enticement of the world and idolatry to serve God and who suffered for the choice. They are of spiritual Israel (Romans 2:29), reigning with Jesus, the King of the church (Romans 5:17, 1 Timothy 6:15), sealed by discipleship (Second Timothy 2:19), sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and quit like men (First Corinthians 16:13).

Questions For Discussion

1. What is the Watchtower Society sometimes called? What do they believe about the number 144,000?

2. The first Greek word of the book of Revelation is *Apokaluyiv*, translated Apocalypse. What do we know about apocalyptic literature, like the books of Ezekiel and Daniel (Revelation 1:1)?

3. Revelation is filled with obvious signs. Describe the symbol in Revelation 9:1-11. What is wrong with making that literal?

4. Consider Revelation 7:1-17. Where are the 144,000 located? Where is the great crowd located? If the 144,000 are supposed to be in Heaven and the only ones there with God, what are some of the implications?

5. What is the one hope of all believers (Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 1:5, John 14:1-6, Philippians 3:14, First Peter 1:3-5, Revelation 21:1-4)? What is to become of the Earth (Second Peter 3:1-13)?

Lesson 9: *What Do You Do For Young People?*

It is a question frequently asked on the telephone. Someone calls the meetinghouse and begs, “What do you do for the young people? What kind of programs do you offer them, etc.?”

Personally, I feed, love, teach and chasten two young people—my children. But if you have in mind what the church here does for young people, we must first wonder what the church is supposed to do for them, especially if that is something different than it does for other people.

The mission of the church is to evangelize the lost, to build up those already safe in Christ, and to gather and distribute benevolent funds for needy members. We know this because we recognize the first century church as a model for our imitation, and those churches were either commanded to do such things, or provide an example or implication of them. The early church spread the gospel (Philippians 4:14-20), edified the saved (Hebrews 10:24-25), and shared with one another (Acts 4:32-35).

What, specifically, did the early church do differently for the young people? One would be hard-pressed to identify anything. Today, churches lure young people in by promising them dodgeball and video games in place of “boring” Bible classes and church-sponsored weenie roasts and amusement park excursions to break the monotony or sweeten the pot. Some churches sponsor Boy Scout troops and do practically anything to entice them inside the building. What do we do for young people?

We provide them with a stable, safe place in which to learn about the gospel, without introducing the distractions of the world around them into this haven of faith. Bible classes are provided twice each week, in which capable, caring teachers will guide them, year-by-year, to prepare themselves to relate to God. These classes supplement the training they ought to be receiving at home (Ephesians 6:1-4). Because the Bible pattern indicates nothing about church-sponsored recreation and entertainment, either as enticements or excursions from the mundane, we do not either. Moreover, they are always in the midst of our worship. Yet truly, young people find wholesome social interaction outside the promotion of the church, as it is supposed to be (First Corinthians 11:33-34, First Timothy 4:8).

Questions For Discussion

1. Consider the following passages and identify how each proves that the early church should be a model for our collective work today.

- First Corinthians 4:17:
- First Corinthians 16:1:
- Colossians 4:16:

2. What was the work of the early church?

- Philippians 4:14-20:
- Hebrews 10:24-25:
- Acts 4:32-35:

3. What can you identify from the New Testament that the early church did any differently for young people than for old? What should this tell us (First Peter 4:11)?

4. Who is the Bible's first "youth minister"? Was ministry so divided in those days (First Timothy 5:1-2, Titus 2:1-10)?

5. What are some of the things that churches do today to attract young people? Are such things primarily spiritual or physical in nature (First Timothy 4:8, Romans 14:17, First Corinthians 11:17-34)?

6. What obligation does the local church have to young people (First Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 3:10)? Where is the primary obligation to them (Ephesians 6:1-4)?

7. What message should churches be sending young people?

Lesson 10: *Can I Be Saved With All My Sins?*

I believe in Jesus and I understand what I must do to be saved, but I have sinned so much in my life. Can I be saved with all my sins?

It is humbling and sometimes discouraging to consider one's record of sin, especially in light of the goodness of God and his hope for us. The Law of Moses was designed, in part, to alert soft-hearted people to the problem of sin (Romans 7:7) and the teaching of the New Testament has an even greater ability to prick the consciences of men who yearn for mercy (Acts 2:36-37).

Sometimes, however, a person has lived such a sin-filled life that he imagines himself somehow beyond the scope of God's grace. Perhaps sins such as fornication, alcoholism, drug abuse, profanity, murder and more seem to be so heinous as to warrant permanent divine abandonment in this life. Thankfully, that is not the case at all. God's grace is always bigger than your sin and if you are willing to trade iniquity for truth, even you can be saved.

An early disciple formerly known as Saul of Tarsus illustrates the awesome power of God's mercy. He was approached by Christ, converted to belief and even made the most prolific writer of New Testament Scripture after persecuting the church and standing by at the martyrdom of Stephen. The apostle we know as Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (First Timothy 1:15).

So maybe you feel like your sins have promoted you to chief or that either God or the church won't accept you even if you do repent. Think again. The congregation in Corinth numbered among its members those who had reformed from fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, theft and drunkenness (First Corinthians 6:9-11). They were washed, sanctified and justified because the message of God's mercy was powerful enough even for them.

No matter the infamy of your transgression, God's grace is big enough to take it away, if you are willing to let go of it and put your faith in him. Sometimes all this is just an excuse for staying in sin and doing nothing. Well, you can't be saved with your sins if you intend on keeping them close by. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Questions For Discussion

1. Think about why someone would express doubt about whether God could forgive all his sins. Perhaps, two very different attitudes are behind the statement of doubt. What could those attitudes be?

2. Sometimes a person only becomes acquainted with Christ after many years of prodigal living and the guilt is truly overwhelming, daunting and discouraging. How did Paul describe this consciousness of failure (Romans 7:7-11, 21-25)?

3. The New Testament has an even greater potential for pricking soft hearts and introducing guilt to the sinner who might become contrite. Whose hearts did Peter prick with his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:21-41)? Is it really possible that God wants to show mercy even to those who killed his son (Second Peter 3:9, First Timothy 2:3-6)?

4. Why did Paul consider himself to be “chief among sinners” (First Timothy 1:12-16, Acts 7:54-8:3)? Is it possible to be “chiefer” than the chief, and thus beyond the reach of God’s grace?

5. What kinds of sins had God forgiven some in the Corinthian church (First Corinthians 6:9-11)? What sins are “worse” (First John 3:4, Luke 13:1-5)?

6. What is necessary if I am going to be saved with all my sins (Second Corinthians 7:8-122, Hebrews 12:1-2, First John 1:9)?

Lesson 11: *Must I Attend Every Service?*

The question almost never indicates growing devotion to the Lord or a commitment to excel in grace and knowledge. When a saint begins to ask, “Must I attend every service?” it usually implies a desire to gather less frequently with the saints and to make God wait for the worshiper’s delayed appearance.

Today, Christians often are given four opportunities each week to come together, either for Bible classes or worship assemblies, totaling five hours out of the 168 in the week as a whole. Five out of 168 hardly sounds like an imposition and yet the question persists, perhaps because so many of those hours interfere with the weekend or necessitate an early wake-up call on Sunday morning.

There is ample evidence, however, that the first Christians were in the habit of coming together on a daily basis. “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

The question itself drips with ingratitude when one contrasts the five hours of weekly worship with the six consecutive hours that Jesus spent hanging on a cross so that we wouldn’t have to (Mark 12:29-30). We seem to say, “Thanks for dying for me, but I really need to sleep till noon on Sundays ... or ... I really don’t want to miss the big game on TV ... or ... I really don’t think there’s much I can learn in a midweek Bible class anyway.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 does more than condemn those who forsake the assembling of the saints; it also gives the motivation for faithful attendance. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.” While you’re busy finding an excuse to stay home, somebody is waiting at the meeting house to encourage you and to be encouraged by you. But you’re not coming.

Must I attend every service? Don’t you want to? Don’t you want to attend every service in Heaven? Aren’t you relieved that Christ didn’t let your attitude keep him from attending his crucifixion? Attending every service possible is a part of good stewardship of time (Ephesians 5:15-17). It is a matter of spiritual priorities (Luke 9:57-62). It is evidence of hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:5-6). It shows concern for one’s example and influence on others (Matthew 5:13-16). Faithful attendance keeps you from missing out on so much (Luke 10:38-42, John 20:24-29).

Questions For Discussion

1. How many hours are there in a week? How many of them did Jesus spend on the cross? How much does God deserve?

2. What is God's purpose in having us come together (Hebrews 10:24-25, Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 4:11-16)?

3. Why should we desire to attend every service and class?

4. Why don't people want to attend every service? What gets in the way (Ephesians 4:28, First John 2:15-17, Second Timothy 3:1-5)?

5. What do the following passages have to add to our decision whether to attend every service or not?

- Ephesians 5:15-17:
- Luke 9:57-62:
- Matthew 5:15-17:
- Matthew 5:13-16:
- Luke 10:38-42 and John 20:24-29:

Lesson 12: *What Is Islam?*

The religion of Islam burst into American consciousness, and for good reason, following the criminal events of Sept. 11, 2001. The terrorists were all Muslim men bent on destroying the American way of life in the name of their god, Allah. What is Islam?

There are about 1.2 billion adherents called Muslims worldwide, including seven million in America and about 2.9 percent more each year. Islam is now the majority faith in 45 nations and is gaining a massive inroads into western nations like England and France where Christianity is on the decline.

Islam was founded by Muhammad (c. 570-632), considered by Muslims to be the last prophet of God. This self-styled philosopher went on a quest for truth and at age 42 claimed to have found it by receiving a message from the angel Gabriel. He spoke out against the paganism and idolatry so prevalent in his day, at first only sharing his message with family and friends. His philosophy, though, spread, especially among the young, and so he went public. At first, he met with great opposition because of a perception that his plan was an economic threat. A journey to Medina allowed him to expand his following and Muhammad became a great political and religious leader. Islam spread not only by philosophical persuasion, but also by military threat. In 630, Muhammad returned to Mecca with 10,000 troops and imposed Islam upon the people without resistance. After his death in 632, Islam continued to spread by violence.

The word "Islam" means submission and the point is to bring people into submission to the Muslim idea of god called Allah, who is supposedly one in the same as the God of Abraham, Jews and Christians, labeled infidels by Muslims who reject Muhammad's authority and the Koran, their holy book.

Islam acknowledges Jesus, but not as the son of God, making him instead to be only a prophet of Allah. Muslims even believe that it was actually Judas Iscariot who died on the cross. For this reason, among many others, the two faiths are incompatible and no amount of ecumenical fervor can rehabilitate the divide.

Islam contains five pillars of faith, which are faith, prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage. In addition to persuasion, Islam has often resorted to violence to spread its appeal. That militant concept is alive today in the doctrine and practice of those Muslims who yearn to destroy Christianity by torture, intimidation and terrorism. Thankfully, many Muslims have disavowed violence and some are even willing to hear more about Jesus. God's people hate the sin but love the sinner.

Questions For Discussion

1. What are followers of Islam called? What is their holy text? What does the word “Islam” mean?

2. Why is Islam spreading even as Christianity seems to decline?

3. Where do God, Abraham, Gabriel and Jesus intersect in Muslim and Christian beliefs?

4. Islam’s military history is clear and its current trend of terrorism and warfare are also obvious. Does the church of Christ have a similar history or any scriptural basis for an armed assault on error (Second Corinthians 10:1-6, Matthew 5:38-48, Luke 22:49-51)? Explain.

5. List the five pillars of Islamic faith and compare them to Christianity.

6. How does “submission” harmonize with Christianity?

- James 4:7:
- Ephesians 5:15-21:
- Colossians 3:18:
- First Peter 5:5:

Lesson 13: *Review*

1. *Is circumcision a sin?* Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised, but not Titus (Acts 16:1-5, Galatians 2:1-5)?

2. *Is interracial marriage a sin?* From what three men are all of the people of the Earth descended (Genesis 9:18-19)? What does that tell us about the issue of race (cf. Acts 17:26)?

3. *Is there really a devil?* What might happen to people who deny the reality of Satan?

4. *Do the saved go directly to heaven?* Describe the fates of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

5. *When is Jesus coming back?* What information did Jesus give about *when* he would be returning after his ascension into Heaven (Matthew 24:1-3, 34-37)?

6. *Should I remember the Sabbath?* What exactly was involved in “keeping the Sabbath” (Numbers 28:1-10, Exodus 35:13, Numbers 15:32-36)? Was it only rest and a sermon or was there more? Do modern Sabbatarians actually “keep the Sabbath”?

7. *What is the purpose of baptism?* How is baptism an appeal (Acts 22:12-16, First Peter 3:18-22)?

8. *Will only 144,000 be in heaven?* What is the one hope of all believers (Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 1:5, John 14:1-6, Philippians 3:14, First Peter 1:3-5, Revelation 21:1-4)? What is to become of the Earth (Second Peter 3:1-13)?

9. *What do you do for young people?* What obligation does the local church have to young people (First Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 3:10)? Where is the primary obligation to them (Ephesians 6:1-4)?

10. *Can I be saved with all my sins?* What is necessary if I am going to be saved with all my sins (Second Corinthians 7:8-122, Hebrews 12:1-2, First John 1:9)?

11. *Must I attend every service?* Why should we desire to attend every service and class?

12. *What is Islam?* What are followers of Islam called? What is their holy text? What does the word “Islam” mean?

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