

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A SERIES OF BIBLE STUDIES BY J.S. SMITH

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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It is the most important question ever asked: "What must I do to be saved?"

The Philippian jailer posed the question to the apostle Paul when he discovered his prisoners had been freed by a divine earthquake. Paul answered his question in Acts 16:31-34: "'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

Once Paul told him that belief was a condition of salvation, he set about to teach the man so that he could believe. Faith does not come apart from the word of God, but by **hearing** it (Rom. 10:17) and **believing** it enough to submit to its truths (Luke 6:46-49).

Faith, you see, is more than just a mental assent to a series of facts. Faith is a trust and loyalty that cause the believer to be converted from his old ways in order to walk in newness of life. The jailer's faith was not idle, but working, for faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). He showed his change of heart by washing the bruises of the apostles that hours before he had cared not about. Indeed, **repentance** of sins is a prerequisite to having them forgiven, as Peter taught on Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

Saving faith is no more silent than it is idle. Some in Jesus's day believed in him, but refused to confess him because they would lose their position in society (John 12:42). Paul taught that an oral **confession** of faith preceded salvation; thus it was a condition of the remission of sins (Rom. 10:9).

None of these acts of submissive faith earns a man his salvation, for grace, by definition is unmerited and no matter what we do, God will not be placed in the debt of a sinner (Luke 17:10).

As much as these acts precede salvation, so does **immersion** in water. Jesus taught that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16) and Peter said that immersion was for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38-41) and to save you (1 Peter 3:20-21). Paul taught that baptism is what places a person into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, Gal. 3:27). Out of that water, a man then must strive to **live faithfully** (Rev. 2:10).

Questions For Discussion

1. Before we can consider what is required to save man, we must understand from what he is being saved. Consider the following and identify from *what* man is to be saved:

- a. John 3:16-21:
- b. Romans 6:20-23:
- c. Matthew 1:21:

2. In recent years, a diet product has promised that you can lose weight and continue eating anything and everything you want. Can one be saved from sin the same way – continuing to live anyway he desires (Rom. 6:1-2, 1 John 3:4-9, Heb. 10:35-39)?

3. Can any person who is guilty of sin be saved without believing in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31, Acts 4:9-12)? What must one believe about him (Acts 8:37, 1 Cor. 15:13-17)?

4. What non-Calvinistic Bible character taught that believing on Jesus was a “work”? How might belief require effort (Heb. 11:6, Matt. 7:7-11, 10:32-39, James 2:20)?

5. Is belief alone sufficient to bring salvation, according to these passages?

- a. Luke 6:46-49:
- b. Matt. 7:21-23:
- c. James 2:14-17:

6. How do you know that confession of faith is necessary to salvation?

7. What role does repentance of sins play in salvation?

8. In what passage are repentance and baptism joined together in preceding salvation?

9. What role do the following passages attribute to water immersion:

- a. 1 Peter 3:20-22:
- b. Rom. 6:4-5:
- c. Gal. 3:27:
- d. Col. 2:11-13:

10. Has one who has confessed, repented and submitted to baptism earned his salvation by virtue of these efforts (Luke 17:7-10, James 2:14-26)?

It is a question that was surely oft repeated in first century Palestine. Jesus asked it once himself: "Who do men say that I am?"

It was the bold apostle Peter who volunteered his opinion that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of the living God. He was a prophet like Elijah, but not just a prophet. He was a teacher like John, but not just a teacher. In fact, he was waiting to become a priest and king as well.

In short, Jesus is the answer. Okay, so what was the problem, you might wonder. The problem was and is sin, which all eventually commits and which none can successfully overcome on his own.

The very first sin ever committed by Adam and Eve occasioned the very prophecy about the incarnation of God the son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. God cursed the serpent for tempting the couple and then promised that Eve's seed would bruise his head even as the tempter bruised his heel. This prophecy was fulfilled on the cross where Jesus's heel was bruised even as he dealt a major blow to the devil's power through the sting of death and the disease of sin.

Sins continued to mount through the Old Testament and generations of people came and went knowing that they needed something to help them overcome. Prophets foretold the coming of a Messiah who would be their deliverer, but many who heard them assumed that the deliverance was from national bondage, not slavery to sin. They underestimated the power and impact the Messiah would have.

Finally, Jesus was born in a body prepared for him by God but through the miraculous conception of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1). He taught a gospel of the kingdom of God that ignored national woes and promised deliverance from the tyranny of sin (Matt. 4:17, John 8:32). The devil figured like many men that Jesus would physically assume a throne and destroy his power and so he had Jesus killed. Only upon the Lord's miraculous resurrection from the tomb three days later did it become apparent that his death was the atoning work and his kingdom was spiritual.

Jesus ascended back into Heaven where he lives to make intercession for his brethren--those who confess faith in him, put him on in baptism and strive to walk by faith each day. Jesus is the way, truth and life and no one comes to the Father except by him (John 14:6). There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Sooner or later, everyone will have to make a decision about Jesus.

Questions For Discussion

1. At what point was Jesus created by God (Rev. 3:14, Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-3,14)?

2. How is Jesus present in the following Genesis passages?

a. Gen. 1:26:

b. Gen. 3:14-15:

3. What was Christ like before coming to Earth (Phil. 2:5-6, Heb. 10:5)?

4. How did Jesus come to Earth? Whose prophecies did his birth fulfill?

5. According to Gabriel, who is Jesus (Matt. 1:23)? How did Paul agree (Col. 2:8-10)?

6. What prophecies did Moses make about the Messiah (Deut. 18:15, 17-18)? Both Malachi and Isaiah predicted that a forerunner would precede the Messiah (Isa. 40:3, Mal. 3:1). Had the forerunner come? Who was he?

7. Did Jesus show any signs of being someone special in between his birth and his brief public ministry. If so, what were they (Luke 2:41-52)?

8. Before his arrest, who did people guess Jesus was (Matt. 16:13-14)? Who did Peter say he was (Matt. 16:15-17, John 6:68-69)?

9. What is Christ, by virtue of his death and resurrection (Acts 2:29-33, Heb. 5:9, Gal. 3:13, 1 John 4:10)?

10. What is Jesus doing today (John 14:6, 1 John 2:1, Heb. 7:24-28)?

FAQ #3

WHEN WAS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ESTABLISHED?

In order to discover when the church of Christ was established, we must begin by getting on the same page about the term "church of Christ."

As the scriptures do not use the term "church of Christ" in a denominational sense, we do not either. The phrase simply describes the assembly of redeemed people who belong to Jesus Christ. It is not parallel to terms of more modern derivation, such as "Baptist church" or "Lutheran church." It is a term used by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 16:16) to designate the ownership of Christ of the collection of people he purchased from the devil with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

In fact, Jesus told the apostles in Matthew 16:16 that he would build his church and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against his efforts. When he broke those gates at his resurrection, he was ready to follow through with the establishment of his church, the church that belongs to him, the church of Christ.

Thus the church of Christ was established in about the year 33 A.D., on the first Pentecost after his ascension back into heaven. That day, more than 3000 souls were baptized into Christ upon their confession of sin and faith. From then on, the called-out were added to this number daily as they obeyed the gospel and put on Christ in obedient faith (Gal. 3:27). The New Testament is the history of the church of Christ.

Neither the rise of Catholicism nor the subsequent birth of Protestantism was able to eliminate the presence of churches of Christ, for the Bible holds the seed to make Christians and the pattern for churches to follow. Records show the presence of such groups in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and in America as far back as the eighteenth century. Indeed, no human can lay claim to the establishment of the church that Christ promised to build himself.

Today, there are still thousands of local congregations that claim no other designation, but "of Christ." Such churches are not part of a larger denomination, for denominationalism was never sanctioned by Christ and was opposed by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Churches of Christ today stand behind no creed but the New Testament and participate in no form of church government beyond that of local elderships overseeing the church among them (1 Peter 5:1-5).

Questions For Discussion

1. What does the phrase "churches of Christ" mean to you? When was the phrase first used in scripture? What advantage does this give the phrase that others do not have?

2. What are some other descriptive phrases that enjoy this same level of divine sanction?

- a. 1 Corinthians 1:2:
- b. 1 Timothy 3:15:
- c. Hebrews 12:23:
- d. Ephesians 1:22-23:

3. When did the assembly of called-out people who belong to Christ by virtue of his blood and the gospel come into existence? Where was the first congregation?

4. Which of the following was involved in adding people to that church?

- a. written or oral examination on biblical knowledge
- b. vote of deacons concerning an applicant's religious experience
- c. applicant's ability to speak in unstudied tongues
- d. sprinkling of water upon an infant's forehead

5. By contrast, two different dates are often offered for the establishment of the "Baptist church." One is during the ministry of John the immerser and the other is through the work of John Smyth in Holland in 1607. What is wrong with each of these dates?

6. If a man believes on Christ, obeys the gospel, but decides to join no denomination, of what denomination is he a member? What modern sects are listed in the New Testament?

7. What role did Alexander Campbell play in the establishment of the church of Christ?

8. Name some creeds for the Methodist churches, Baptist churches, Catholic Church and churches of Christ.

9. Who was the head of the churches of Christ at the end of the first century?

10. How are local congregations governed?

Is salvation by faith? Yes, yes, a hundred times yes!

Salvation is by faith, because the Holy Spirit says it is. Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that of yourselves, it is the gift of God," Paul writes. Jesus told Nicodemus that God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son to die that the faithful might find life eternal (John 3:16).

That salvation is by faith is beyond question. The controversy arises among men over whether or not salvation is by faith only. You will note that the Holy Spirit did not use the word only in relation to faith in Ephesians 2 and actually coupled it with grace instead of casting it alone. The only passage in the entire Bible that employs the famous Calvinistic phrase "faith only" actually argues that justification cannot be obtained by means of faith alone (James 2:24).

Some would suggest that salvation, justification and sanctification are separate ideals and we would take no issue with that. The three principles, however, are intensely interrelated, so that no justified man could be unsaved and no unsaved man could be sanctified.

Even the passage before us in James 2:14-24 begins with the rhetorical question: "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can faith save him?"

The Calvinist would be compelled by his creeds to answer affirmatively despite the obvious negative implication of the context. Faith without works is dead, but the obedience of a man makes his faith complete.

We do not begin to suggest that salvation can be earned, for it is the gift of God and nothing man could do would put God in his debt or even pay back the debt of the cross. Yet the Holy Spirit has seen fit to distinguish between the man whose faith is nothing more than a mental assent to a series of facts and the man whose faith is defined by trust and obedience. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

Jesus himself distinguished between those religious sounding and looking folks who diminished their piety with works of lawlessness and the omission of true obedience. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

The attachment of certain conditions to salvation like faith, confession and discipleship do not nullify the fact that God's grace is a gift, for we admit that his blessing can never be earned and offers no justification for boasting. Salvation is by faith, but no Bible writer ever claimed it was by faith alone. Jesus himself denied that untruth and recommended the effectiveness of faith, working through love (Gal. 5:6).

Questions For Discussion

1. Is salvation through faith? How do you know?

2. The controversy with Calvinism is not over "salvation by faith," but "salvation by faith

alone. What bible passage discusses salvation by faith alone? What does it say?

3. Martin Luther imagined disharmony between James 2 and Romans 4, but those who believe in the inerrancy of the bible are compelled to seek a harmony between faith and works. How would you harmonize James 2:14-26 and Romans 4:1-8 (cf. Gal. 5:1-6)?

4. Does faith itself require human effort, or is it forced upon him by the Holy Spirit (John 6:29, Matt. 7:7-8, James 1:21, Acts 7:51, Heb. 11:6)?

5. Consider James 1:22-27. How does this passage urge more than belief alone?

6. Browse through Hebrews 11. Why did these people have their faith praised?

7. Was Noah's life preserved by faith (Gen. 6:5-9,22)? Was Naaman saved from leprosy by faith (2 Kings 5:1-14)? Was either saved by faith alone? When were they saved?

8. How did Jesus preempt the doctrine of salvation by faith alone in Matthew 7:13-27?

9. The rulers in John 12:42-43 believed; were they saved (Matt. 10:32-33, Rom. 10:9)?

10. For whom is Jesus the author of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:8-9)?

When asked by Pilate if he was a king, Jesus replied, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'

"Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'"

It was the great philosophical question of the time and since it is the truth that makes men free, the curiosity about truth is no less important today. What is truth?

Simply, Truth is the redeeming revelation of Almighty God found on the pages of the 66 books in what we call The Bible. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, Jehovah weaves a record of humanity's rise, fall and resurrection. The tree of eternal life, lost in Eden, is regained through Christ in Heaven. Truth is the good news that hope exists, but that it exists not in worldly goods and big bank accounts, but in a humble savior who died for our redemption.

Truth is pure, but men unwittingly corrupt it by trying to clarify it or amend it. Creeds and catechisms have been written for centuries and the net effect has been a gradual drifting away from truth. While all scripture is inspired of God and all who speak on his behalf should speak only as the oracles of God reveal, many have sought to go beyond the limits of truth to appease their own ambitions and opinions. When we burn all the creeds and go back to the bible, we will find unpoluted, unadulterated truth, the mind of God himself.

Truth has no contradictions. The catechisms contradict the New Testament. So do the book of Mormon and the imaginations of the Watchtower Society. Truth does not deny the person of Christ. Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism do.

The bible contains two major divisions, an Old Testament and a New Testament. Both are truth. The Old Testament points to the coming of Christ by means of prophecy and a temporary law of Moses that showed sinful men their need for grace. The New Testament is the perfect law of liberty that lays out the gospel plan of salvation and issues an edict of righteous living and hope for all who submit to it. Truth foresees the return of Christ and a judgment of all mankind.

Can you handle the truth?

Questions For Discussion

1. What bible character asked the question, "What is truth?" On what occasion? Was he genuinely seeking truth?

2. What is true of those who are "of the truth" (John 18:37)? What does this mean?

3. In our context, what is truth? (Think!) Is there room in scripture for an “alternate truth” (John 1:17, 14:6)?

4. Consider John 17:17. Where is truth to be found today? How was this location of truth created and collected (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21, John 16:13)? What power does Jesus attribute to truth in John 17:17?

5. Consider John 8:30-32. What potential does Jesus attribute to truth here? How is truth often communicated, according to Romans 10:14-17 and Ephesians 3:4?

6. In John 8:31, a condition is placed upon the hearer who would be set free by truth. What is the condition? Explain (1 John 2:1-6, 2 John 4).

7. List some impediments to the acceptance of truth.

- a. Matthew 13:19:
- b. Matthew 13:21:
- c. Matthew 13:22:
- d. Galatians 1:6-9:

8. What becomes of those who lack a desire for truth (2 Thess. 2:9-12, Rom. 2:8-9, 2 Tim. 4:3-4)?

9. What power is attributed to truth in 1 Peter 1:22-25? What condition is attached?

10. What part of the “Christian’s Armor” illustrates truth? Explain.

Some are surprised to visit the worship services of a church of Christ and discover that the building lacks a piano, bandstand, drum set and string section. "Where's the organ?" many ask.

The organ is there; it is just hard to see and its sound is not what you might expect.

When Christians make a decision to do all things in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17), that is, by his authority, they are led in certain directions and prevented from going in others. Peter said, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Because Jesus has all authority over the church and the New Testament contains all truth for it, we are compelled to do all that it orders and to avoid all that it does not.

Musical worship is an important part of the New Testament pattern for the church of Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that instruments of music like the harp and flute were prominent in temple worship under the Old Testament, they are not mentioned in any context dealing with praise for Christ under his New Testament.

Mechanical music is not alone in this regard. Animal sacrifice and incense burning were also facets of temple worship that were not renewed for the church. No matter how much a worshiper may desire any of these three activities, without scriptural approval in the New Testament, such could only be a sin of presumption (cf. Lev. 10:1-3).

The worship pattern for the church was developed by the Holy Spirit. No one can claim to be led by the Spirit who follows a different path than the one he revealed (John 14:26).

He says: "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord..." (Eph. 5:18-19).

Did you see the organ contained there for New Testament worship? It is not one with pipes and pedals, but one that can submit to truth and express emotion. The heart of the worshiper is the only organ authorized in musical worship today. With it, we can form meaningful sounds and worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Questions For Discussion

1. Questions about music in our worship are really practical matters of religious authority? How do we go about establishing what is authorized in our worship today?

2. Who has all authority in the church? How would you describe the authority exercised by elders and evangelists then? How much authority is there for creed conventions?

3. What are the three ways of establishing authority in the bible, as well as in all life?

4. Are sectarian creeds, human tradition and personal preference equally viable forms of authority (Matt. 15:1-9)? Explain your answer.

5. Were mechanical instruments used in Old Testament worship? Is there any evidence of them being used in worship by first century churches?

6. Why doesn't the presence of instruments in the Old Testament authorize them for the church today (Eph. 2:11-16, Col. 2:13-14, Matt. 17:1-5)?

7. What does it mean to worship according to the Spirit and truth (John 4:24)?

8. Identify three New Testament passages that discuss our musical worship.

9. Why is it presumptuous to add instruments to our musical worship? How does this effort parallel God's judgment of Nadab and Abihu?

10. Identify the organ that is necessary to musical worship under the New Testament.

FAQ #7

WHEN WILL THE KINGDOM COME?

The question was on the apostles' minds on the day of Ascension. They asked Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

They wanted to know if their narrow hopes of seeing Israel restored to its former glory were about to be realized through a military campaign led by a glorified Messiah. Acts chapter 1 marks the beginning of the end of their shortsighted misunderstanding about the nature of the kingdom.

The kingdom of Christ was never intended to be a Hebrew state. In order to fulfill the Seed promise to Abraham, blessing would have to redound upon all nations, not just Israel (Gen. 12:3). The Seed was the Messiah (Gal. 3:16) who brought the gospel of grace to sinners of every nation who are willing to fear God and do what is right (Acts 10:34).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10) and even promised them that some of his generation would live to see it. "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1) If the kingdom was not established in a reasonably short period of time, Jesus turned out to be a false prophet.

In fact, to the dismay of modern Jews who are still waiting for the first coming of a Messiah whom they missed, the kingdom was established on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles who preached Jesus to his persecutors and proclaimed that Christ was even then at the right hand of God, sitting upon the throne of David. According to Acts 2:29-33, David foresaw the coronation of Christ as his resurrection from the dead and glorious return to heaven. His soul was not left in hades, but arose and blazed the trail by which every man and woman can conquer death and hope for heaven.

The kingdom of God is not a kingdom like this world is accustomed to seeing, but is spiritual in nature, mission and governance. People are conveyed into it when they obey the gospel (Col. 1:13, Acts 2:38-47). The kingdom of God in this present time is synonymous with the church that Christ established, for its members are heaven's citizenry (Phil. 3:20). The terms kingdom and church are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:13-18 and our Savior is now referred to as King of kings, not crown prince in exile (1 Tim. 6:15). The kingdom has come!

Questions For Discussion

1. Whose idea was it to have an earthly king in Israel in the first place (1 Sam. 8)? Why?

2. A yearning for an earthly kingdom still motivates many Jews and Premillennialists today. What were the apostles thinking when they asked Jesus about restoring the kingdom (Acts 1:6-8). To what event did Jesus direct them instead?

3. In what ways did Jesus tie his ministry to the anticipation of a kingdom?
 - a. Matthew 4:23:
 - b. Matthew 6:10:
 - c. Matthew 13:44-50:
 - d. Luke 16:16-17:

4. What evidence exists that this new kingdom was never intended to be a Hebrew state?

5. Daniel prophesied that the kingdom would come during the reign of the third worldwide empire after Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire. Complete the following chart after reading Daniel 2:31-46.

EMPIRE ORDER	BODY PART	EMPIRE
1	Head of gold	Babylon
2		
3		
4		

6. During which empire did Jesus live. What is true of Daniel if the kingdom did not come during this timeframe (Deut. 18:20-22)?

7. Premillennialists suggest that a surprise Jewish rejection of Jesus delayed the establishment of the kingdom until the second coming. How does Matthew 16:21-28 destroy the concept that Christ's death prevented the kingdom from coming?

8. Consider Acts 2:22-36. When and how did the kingdom come?

9. What is the realm of Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Matt. 16:16-18)?

10. How close will Jesus get to returning to the dust of Earth (1 Thess. 4:13-18)?

"Do you believe in miracles?"

That question may bring more nostalgia for Al Michaels's call of the 1980 Olympic hockey team upset of the Soviet Union than for the word of God. That, however points out the problem.

No matter how unlikely that victory was, it was not a miracle. In the word of God, nothing short of supernatural, divine intervention is described as miraculous. Hockey upsets, childbirth, and a full house at an Expos game may be unusual or amazing, but they are not miracles.

The Bible, however, is replete with records of miracles. One cannot be a Christian without believing in miracles, for to doubt the supernatural would be to deny the authenticity both of the Bible and of the Savior. Of miracles, John wrote, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31).

Jesus or his apostles healed the sick, spoke in unstudied tongues, read minds, and even raised the dead. The greatest miracle of all was the resurrection of Christ from the tomb after three days. One who rejects the validity of miracles cannot even be a Christian. If there are no miracles, then there was no resurrection, for it was a most supernatural event. If Christ is not risen, the preaching of the Bible is only vain and all men remain in their sins (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Faith becomes empty and futile without miracles.

Do miracles persist even today? Miracles were never intended to be a permanent feature of the New Testament church. Mark describes their purpose as "confirming the word" (16:20), not drawing an audience or pumping in funds. When the New Testament words were all revealed and confirmed, the purpose of miracles was likewise fulfilled and satisfied. Paul looked forward to the time in which we live, when God's law of liberty would be perfected and his prophecy for mankind would be delivered once for all (James 1:25, Jude 3). Then, he says, prophecies, tongues and miraculous insight could cease as the church matured from infancy to adulthood.

Miracles were genuine in the Bible, but have since ceased.

Questions For Discussion

1. What is the definition of a "miracle"?

2. Which of the following are miracles – electric light, childbirth, lunar landing, narrow escape from an auto wreck?

3. What is the first miracle recorded in the Bible? What was Christ's first miracle?

4. Is it possible to believe in God and the Bible, but not believe in miracles?

5. List the nine miraculous abilities people possessed in the first century (1 Cor. 12:7-10).
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
 - h.
 - i.

6. What was the purpose of such miracles (Mark 16:20, Heb. 2:1-4)? How did the apostles receive the abilities (Luke 24:47, Acts 2)? How did others receive them (Acts 8)?

7. Consider 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Is an end to supernatural gifts predicted? When?

8. If miracles are not still occurring today, how do you explain the dramatic improvement of very sick people for whom we have prayed (James 5:13-20)? How do you explain other unlikely events?

9. Two miracles surrounding the deity of Christ are sometimes called into question, even by some professing Christians. Can we reject the nativity and resurrection of Christ and still be his disciples (1 Cor. 15:12-19)? Why or why not?

10. Is it a miracle when a person obeys the gospel (Rom. 10:14-17)?

To tithe or not to tithe? That is often the question.

The Law of Moses regulated the giving aspect of Hebrew worship with the tithe. A strict ten percent offering of certain animals and produce was mandated, leaving little personal consideration to the worshiper himself. He could obey or disobey, but the amount he was supposed to give was etched in stone.

To many modern preachers and worshipers, this sounds like the perfect system and yet even Old Testament experience shows that humanity can mar it. Malachi wrote, "And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably" (Mal. 1:8)?

The Jews imagined a loophole in their worship, by which they could offer to God their refuse and expect his approval. Their hearts were disconnected from their worship and they were simply going through the motions in the least expensive way imaginable (cf. Isa. 1:10-20). God was not pleased.

Jesus could have reformed the tithe and instituted it for his new covenant after the cross. Things that were lawful and approved prior to the cross were not necessarily added to the new testament of Jesus Christ. Animal sacrifice was left behind, as was incense burning, the Sabbath and instrumental music in worship. The apostle Paul described this transition as the abolition of "the law of commandments, contained in ordinances" which formerly separated Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-22). A parallel passage says the old law was taken out of the way and figuratively nailed to Christ's cross with him (Col. 2:11-15). If we make an attempt to justify our actions or our worship choices with the Law of Moses, we fall from God's grace (Gal. 5:4).

So, while numerous passages regulate the tithe for Israel under the Old Testament, a different and incompatible form of giving is prescribed in the New Testament. The tithe does not fit in the church because God did not put it there.

The practice of the first century church was that each member laid something aside on the first day of the week, forming the treasury of the local congregation, from which it funded its evangelism, edification and benevolence work (1 Cor. 16:1-4, cf. Phil. 4:15-16, Acts 4:32-37).

In regulating this offering, no apostle ever demanded anyone earmark 10 percent of his funds as the mandatory gift. Instead, the saint was commanded to "give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). The purpose in one's heart must also reflect the degree to which God has prospered him (1 Cor. 16:2).

Is that more, less or the same as ten percent? Some still would prefer a number mandated for them, instead of this act of worship being left up to their discretion. Sorry, the new covenant is a law written on the heart and it requires the involvement and development of your own selflessness and participation. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6).

Because it is the first day of the week on which the saints made their offering, it is reasonable to conclude that this was part of their weekly assembly for worship, fellowship and communion (Acts 20:7). For this reason, the collection plate is passed

every Sunday and only on Sunday in churches of Christ, so that each church's members can fund the work of God in that place.

The worshiper is set free from the restrictions of the tithe and liberated to purpose in his own heart what he will give. Give liberally and lovingly and remember that everything you contribute is simply returning to God a portion of what he entrusted to you (James 1:17).

Questions for Discussion

1. Who paid the first tithe, and to whom? What is the exact amount of a tithe?

2. What kinds of things were tithed (Lev. 27:30-33, Deut. 14:22-23)? Who received benefit from the tithes (Num. 18:21-32, Heb. 7:5)?

3. What was wrong with the tithing of the following people?
 - a. Post-Exile Hebrews (Mal. 3:8-10):
 - b. Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14):
 - c. Pharisees and scribes (Matt. 23:23-24):

4. How did God respond to people who offered their tithes, but from only 10% of their hearts (Isa. 1:10-20)?

5. Because the Law of Moses was fulfilled and taken out of effect, tithing joins one of two groups. Either it joins animal sacrifice, incense burning and instrumental music in worship as unauthorized for the church, or it joins singing and prohibitions against murder and adultery as renewed for the church. To which group does tithing belong?

6. Instead of tithing, what did Paul command the Corinthians to do (1 Cor. 16:1-4)?

7. Examine the giving of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1-7). How is it characterized?

8. What further guidelines does Paul add to our giving in 2 Corinthians 9:1-14?

9. Can our giving support evangelism, as well as benevolence (1 Cor. 9:14, 2 Cor. 11:8)?

10. What kind of investment is our offering?

FAQ #10

WHAT HAPPENED TO CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS?

"My King James Version mentions Easter, but my New King James does not. Have Christian holidays be abolished?"

Not exactly abolished; they never existed biblically to begin with.

Under the Law of Moses, the nation of Israel was to observe a number of feasts and special days as a mandatory part of their worship. God knew how to authorize such holidays and he did so. Since that law was only for Israel and the kingdom of Christ spans the globe, the Law of Moses was fulfilled by Jesus at the cross and taken out of the way (Matt. 5:17-20, Eph. 2, Col. 2, Acts 10, Heb. 8:13). Instead, we live under the new covenant today, sometimes called the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25), the law of faith (Rom. 3:27), the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2) or the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

When we read through our New Testaments, we see absolutely no authority for "Christian holidays." The disciples never celebrated Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's Day or Halloween. In fact, the Roman Pope added each of these "holidays" as he attempted to conquer heathen lands by merging their pagan observances into Christianity. Rather than demand that heathen converts cease their idolatrous days, he persuaded them to alter their days into something "Christian." A celebration of the sun became a celebration of the son. Ishtar became Easter. And so on.

Used in the King James Version of Acts 12:4, "Easter" is actually an intentional mistranslation of the word "Passover," which appears in later translations. The Jews in Jerusalem were not hiding Easter eggs and munching chocolate bunnies; they did not even believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They were still marking the Passover from Old Testament times.

God proved in the Old Testament that he knew how to authorize religious holidays, but he chose to keep the emphasis on a first day of the week communion with Christ in the New Testament (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11). We invade his throne when we attempt to impose our holidays upon his faith, fulfilling a sad prophecy in Matthew 15:1-9 and a grave warning in Galatians 4:8-11.

If such days can be observed secularly, without imposing them upon God as religious holidays, they may be rendered harmless, but when inserted on to a church calendar and thrust upon the Lord, they are unauthorized and insulting.

Questions For Discussion

1. Consider the conversation in Matthew 21:23-27. What two sources of authority did Jesus contrast here? Which is genuinely binding among the children of God (Matt. 16:18, 28:18-20, Acts 5:39)?

2. Are Easter, Christmas, St. Patrick's Day and All Hallows' Eve from God or men? How does Jesus warn us against substituting our traditions for his doctrine in Matthew 15:1-9?

3. How has God proven that he knows how to authorize religious holy days? What would be wrong with the church doing the authorizing today, according to 1 Peter 4:11?

4. Why can't we use Old Testament authority for celebrating certain holy days (Matt. 5:17-20, Eph. 2:14-16, Col. 2:13-17, Matt. 17:1-8)?

5. Some would answer that the church is free to make and celebrate its own holidays because we are not under law at all in this age. How does the New Testament establish that we are both under grace and a new law now?

a. James 1:25:

b. Romans 8:2:

c. Galatians 6:1-2:

d. Romans 4:15, 1 John 3:4, Matt 1:21:

6. Where is the word "Easter" found in the bible? What is really intended? Is this authority for a church holiday to celebrate the resurrection of Christ?

7. What divinely authorized commemoration already surrounds the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:26-29, 1 Cor. 11:17-34)?

8. What makes the matter of church holidays serious (Gal. 4:8-11, John 4:23-24)?

9. How can some holidays be observed by Christians without falling into condemnation?

My daughter came home from school today and said that all her classmates and her teacher believe that December 25 is Jesus's birthday and that we don't love him unless we celebrate it. Where does the Bible say that December 25 is Christ's birthday?

If it is, God neglected to tell us about it. Although the Bible makes reference to his place of birth, his parentage, and the supernatural occurrences that preceded and followed, it nowhere says anything about the actual date. Even if it did, the Bible does not issue a command to celebrate Christ's birth, once a year or at all.

Judging from the chronology of the birth of his cousin, John the immerser, it becomes more likely that Mary actually conceived Jesus in December and bore him the following year in the early autumn months. The celebration of Christmas is not of apostolic or divine origin, for more than 60 years of Bible history follow in the New Testament after Christ's death and there is no mention anywhere of a celebration of his birth.

Instead, Christmas is another in a long line of observances created by Romanism to assuage the idolaters whom they were trying to convert. Rather than condemn their annual observances of certain false deities outright, the missionaries simply mixed that holiday with something Christian and permitted it to continue. Thus a December day honoring the sun god, Saturn, becomes "Christ Mass," to honor the son instead.

Although it may seem harmless to throw a surprise party for Jesus that he never requested, it ventures into territory that is beyond the authority of God. In principle, Jesus condemned such presumption: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:8-9). Christmas is a precept of man that has ended up in the creed books and practices of billions of people, but there is no New Testament command or example to validate it.

The Bible does command us to honor the life of Christ, but not in an annual gift-giving exercise. We are to partake of his body and blood in the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, to proclaim his death until he returns (1 Cor. 11:23-34).

Questions For Discussion

1. What do the following prophecies predict about the birth and childhood of Jesus?
 - a. Micah 5:2:
 - b. Isaiah 7:14:
 - c. Isaiah 9:6-7:
 - d. Isaiah 53:1-2:
 - e. Hosea 11:1:
 - f. Luke 1:31-33:

2. Why did Joseph nearly decide to put Mary away secretly before marrying her? What prevented him?

3. Where was Jesus born and then laid? What group of people traveled there to see him?

4. When and how did the three wise men find the Babe (Matt. 2:1-12)?

5. The last mention of Christ's youth involves an event when he was 12 years old (Luke 2:41-52). What was his "father's business"?

6. With all this historical and spiritual information, on what day and in what year was Jesus Christ born to Mary?

7. In what passage are Christians commanded to commemorate his birth? How? What are the origin and purpose of "Christmas" then?

8. Mariology is the Catholic doctrine by which the mother of Jesus is proclaimed co-redemptrix and intercessor along with her son. She is called a "perpetual virgin" as if having other children would sully her reputation. Did Jesus have siblings?

9. How did Jesus honor his mother without elevating her above humanity?
 - a. Matthew 12:46-50:
 - b. Luke 11:27-28:

10. What is wrong with celebrating Christmas as if it were Christ's birthday and venerating Mary as if she were coequal with her son (Matt. 15:1-14)?

Can you name the apostles of the church of Christ?

It is a question that has befuddled generations of Bible class students, causing them to spend endless hours memorizing names that are both familiar and obscure. But the question begs another: when those original apostles died, did any others take their office?

Luke gives his list in Acts 1:13, consisting of Peter, James, John and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. The careful reader will quickly note that only 11 names are given because Judas Iscariot had committed suicide about a month earlier following his betrayal of Christ. The apostolic company, however, did not begin the church age shorthanded. One of them took note of an ancient prophecy in the book of Psalms: “Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it’ and ‘Let another take his office.’”

Candidates who could testify that the risen Christ was the same Jesus they had seen during his ministry were narrowed to two and Matthias was selected by Christ through casting lots.

More apostles died, however, as the New Testament progressed, but there is no record of any of their offices being refilled. Only that of Iscariot was vacated by disloyalty and before Pentecost and only his was authorized by prophecy to be refilled. Herod killed James with the sword (Acts 12:2) before the gathering of apostles and elders at Jerusalem and yet we do not see the process of apostolic succession there or anywhere.

The filling of Iscariot’s office was done under limited authority for that office in particular and does not establish apostolic succession for any of their offices. The church of Christ is blessed to be built on a foundation of apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20) given by the Lord (Eph. 4:11), but the New Testament simply does not authorize the process of apostolic succession so popular in Catholicism and Mormonism. Apostles were required to give eyewitness testimony about Christ before and after his death (Acts 1:21-22) and no man since the second century has been so qualified.

Questions For Discussion

1. What is the literal translation of the word “apostle”?

2. Although others are described as apostles in a different sense of the word or according to a different selection, 12 men are most closely associated with the apostolic office. Their names are listed several times, in three groups of four (Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16, Acts 1:13). Identify them, harmonizing different names in different lists.

- a. Two pairs of fisherman brothers:
- b. Middle Four:
- c. Final Four:

3. The apostles received two commissions from Jesus. Summarize each of them, according to the following passages.

a. Matthew 10:1, 5-15:

b. Matthew 28:18-20:

4. At the last supper, the apostles had a dispute among themselves about which one was the chief (Luke 22:14, 24-30). Whom did Jesus anoint there as the head apostle? What arguments are often made in support of the primacy of Peter from Matthew 16:13-16 and John 21:15-19?

5. Identify some interesting notes about the following apostles.

a. nickname of James and John (Mark 3:17):

b. occupation of Matthew (Matthew 9:9):

c. meaning of Zealot, as an appellation for Simon:

d. Peter's martial status (Matt. 8:14)?:

e. Thomas's post-biblical nickname:

6. Which of these 12 offices was slated in prophecy for a successor (Acts 2:20)? Which were not? What churches today continue to practice apostolic succession? What qualifications did Peter list for the office (Acts 1:21-22)?

7. List four other men who are called apostles in the New Testament.

8. What authority did the apostles possess, according to these passages?

a. Matt. 16:19, John 16:12-15:

b. Acts 8:18:

9. What evidence suggests the apostles were not morally or behaviorally infallible?

10. Specifically, how are the apostles part of the foundation of the church?

LESSON #13

REVIEW

1. What must I do to be saved? (Prove your response with scripture.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

2. Who is Jesus Christ? Is he a creature or creator (Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-14)? What does he do today (John 14:6, 1 John 2:1, Heb. 7:24-28)?

3. When was the church of Christ established? How is it described in scripture? Is it a denomination?

4. Is salvation by faith? Is it by faith alone? How do you know?

5. What bible character asked, "What is truth?" What is truth (John 17:17)? What does truth do (John 8:30-32)?

6. What kind of organ is authorized for musical worship in the churches? What are the parallels between modern day instrumental music in worship and the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10:1-3)?

7. When did Daniel predict the kingdom of God would come? What is the kingdom? When did it come? (Prove your answer with scripture.)

8. Can one be a Christian without believing in miracles? List a few of the more obviously indispensable miracles of the bible. Are miracles still being worked today?

9. How is our sacrificial giving regulated in the New Testament, as opposed to the tithe of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 9:7)?

10. Why can't we use Old Testament authority for celebrating certain holy days (Matt. 5:17-20, Eph. 2:14-16, Col. 2:13-17, Matt. 17:1-8)?

11. What is Christ's birthday? What regular commemoration of his life is authorized in the New Testament?

12. What were the qualifications for filling the office of Iscariot (Acts 1:21-22)? Was general apostolic succession authorized in the New Testament?

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