

**Pepper Road Church of Christ**

***“CONVICTING  
THOSE WHO  
CONTRADICT”***

**Helping Saints Prepare to Answer and Persuade Those in Error**

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# Introduction

As the world sees it, Christianity is splintered and divided into a multitude of sects and denominations. This class will focus on understanding the fundamental issues that separate the Lord's faithful from the teachings of the most prevalent denominations and cults. Emphasis will be placed not on exhaustive understanding of every nuance or curious difference, rather the priority will be placed on understanding the root of division, so that we may walk in integrity and be prepared to persuade others at every occasion. Consequently, most of the lesson preparation will focus on answering questions asked from an opposing perspective. The ultimate goal is to help all people come to a more accurate and thereby united understanding of God's Word to His glory, the growth of His church, and our spiritual health.

## Prerequisite

Because of this quarter's time constraints, it is assumed for the purpose of this class that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, which was originally inspired verbally and without error. *If* any errors or variations have crept into the text's transmission over the years, they are either doctrinally inconsequential or easily identifiable such as to maintain the promises of **John 10:35; II Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 3:3-5; I Peter 1:22-25**, and similar. Challenges to this assumption are valid, fair, and welcome outside of this class.

## Presupposition

With a limited amount of common sense, one can read the Bible and learn how to fully understand it, while refuting errors contrary to Scripture.

## Thanks

Many thanks are extended to Brad Collins, who developed the material for the section on 4. Seventh Day Sabbath Keepers and taught it, and to Greg Steele, who developed the material for the section on 8. Mormonism and taught it. Each prepared and delivered their material with little notice and from a wealth of experience, and to each I am grateful.

# 1. Introduction to Careful Bible Study

## Overview of the Bible

### Authorship and Organization

The Bible is a collection of 66 small books and epistles that were written by around 40 writers over a timespan of about 1500 years. Each book is divided into chapters, and the chapters are each divided into verses. Thirty-nine of the books make up the Old Testament, which covers events from creation up to the 400 years of silence. The last twenty-seven books of the Bible make up the New Testament, and it covers events from the announcement of John the Baptist's birth until the giving of the last book, Revelation, near the close of the first century. These books were written in various places in the Middle East (for example, Mt. Sinai, Palestine, Babylon, and Rome) by people from various stations of life (for example, kings, shepherds, farmers, officers to kings, priests, a doctor, a tax collector, and fishermen). And, finally, the Bible consists of many types of writing (for example, law, poetry, history, narrative, biography, and prophecy).

### Unity of Message

Despite the vast timespan over which the Bible was written, the numerous contributors, and the differences in cultural and civil context, the Bible has one central theme and message, because it is inspired by one Author (**Ecclesiastes 12:11; II Timothy 3:16-17**).

1. Imagine you were beginning a study with a neighbor, and they asked, "What is the Bible about?" How would you explain the central theme of the Bible?

### Major Bible Periods or Dispensations

The Bible covers three different periods or dispensations, which differ according to God's method of communicating with mankind as well as the agreement or requirements He offered:

- I. **Patriarchal** – God dealt with people through individual heads ("*fathers*", **Hebrews 1:1**) of families (**Genesis 6:13; 7:1; 18:19; 26:3, 24; 28:13; Job 1:5**) as well as various priests and prophets (**Genesis 14:18; 20:7; Numbers 22:1-20; Exodus 18:1-12; Job 42:7-10**). This dispensation extends at least to the giving of the Law of Moses, after which the Bible history most closely follows the nation of Israel.
- II. **Mosaical** – At Mt. Sinai after the exodus from Egypt, God delivered a special law through Moses to the Israelites as a nation, which extended to the death of Jesus on the cross. The Old Testament portion of the Bible primarily focuses on these first two dispensations.
- III. **Christian** – Although Jesus began to deliver His will while on the earth, the new global covenant was not ratified until His death on the cross, which covenant continues to the end of time. The New Testament portion of the Bible focuses on the introduction of this dispensation.



Various errors associated with the distinctions and boundaries of the Mosaical and Christian dispensations will be analyzed in more detail in a later section of this study guide dealing with common denominational errors. Associating a given passage with the correct dispensation is critical to understanding each passage.

## **Overcoming Barriers to Bible Study and Unity**

Regardless, if we are examining our own spiritual convictions, considering another's beliefs, or asking someone to consider our own beliefs, certain attitudes, virtues, and concepts are critical to arriving at an accurate interpretation of God's Word. The goal of this section is to first understand and develop these virtues ourselves and then second to prepare us to help others recognize and develop these virtues, attitudes, and methods.

### **Our Motivation**

2. Even if we have studied these topics previously, why might this class be important for us to study now?
3. What spiritual virtues are essential for a proper understanding of God's Word and resolving differences about the meaning of Scripture?

### **Barrier #1 – Failures in Motivation**

4. Imagine you knock on someone's door and ask them for a Bible study. How would you respond to their answer, "But, I am **already** a Christian!"?
5. What if you struck up a religious conversation with a co-worker, and he asserted, "One church is as good as another." How would you respond?
6. Pretend that you were talking with your hair-dresser (or barber), and she (or he) said, "I don't argue about religion." What would you say?

## **Approaching the Bible**

However one approaches the Bible greatly impacts their interpretation of it, because it sets up a bias that is difficult to overcome without repeated corrections and rebukes from the text itself. Some prevalent, incorrect approaches and ideas about the Bible are outlined and corrected below.

## Broken Methods of Interpretation

There are several methods to interpret the Bible that muddy or entirely prevent our understanding of it, which need to be defined, understood, and avoided:

- **Unbelieving** – Neither the atheist nor the one who doubts the preservation of inspired Scripture will be able to fully understand the Bible, simply because they will be unwilling to put forth the mental effort to reconcile any blocking difficulties. Furthermore, whether conscious or unconscious, their prejudicial skepticism will seek to establish irreconcilable differences and peculiarities – not reconcile them. Because of time limitations, we will save this discussion for time outside of class.
- **Rational** – People with this overly emphasized rational mindset do not just use their mind, but they place their intellect **above** Scripture as the final arbiter and judge of God’s will. “Unreasonable” demands from the Bible are rejected by them, regardless of the text’s clear language. Small-minded fundamentalism is too simplistic for them to accept.
- **Mystical** – Mystics believe the Bible cannot be properly understood without a mystical, spiritual union with God. Typically, they look to the Holy Spirit to somehow directly reveal what the text **really** means. We will discuss this problematic interpretative method in more detail in later sections dealing with Calvinism, Pentecostal, and charismatic errors.
- **Hierarchical** – This method is known for granting authority to rightly interpret the Bible to a church hierarchy. Fundamentally, subscribers to this method believe that only the church’s priesthood can correctly understand and explain Scripture. Any difficulties are resolved by higher officers and councils. We will discuss this method in more detail in later sections dealing with the Catholic Church and cults.
- **Majority** – Similar to the hierarchical method, a person yields his individual decision to another, except in this case, he simply follows the most popularly held viewpoint.
- **Allegorical** – Those who hold to this method accept the obvious meaning of each passage, but they also presume that there is a deeper, greater meaning to every passage, somehow encoded in the text, which is not related to the obvious meaning of the text in any way, except through some proposed “decoder ring”. The extremely presumptive, unbounded, and unpredictable nature of this interpretative method is incompatible with a God of order and a Bible that teaches, and so it is therefore dismissed.
- **Literal** – Although literalists readily grasp the obvious meaning of the text, they are reluctant to accept figurative interpretation. Therefore, they tend to literally interpret even highly symbolic books, such as **Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah**. Premillennial adherents would generally employ this method. Because of recent studies, we will not cover this in more detail.
- **Spiritual** – The spiritualist runs to the opposite extreme of the literalist. The bulk of Scripture should be interpreted figuratively or spiritually to them. “When in doubt, spiritualize”, is their motto. Advocates of realized eschatology (Max King’s AD 70 doctrine) would most readily fall into this camp, although there is some overlap with those who adopt the mystical method.

Because of recent studies, we will not cover this in more detail, except what we will further cover in the sections on Calvinism, Pentecostal, and charismatic errors.

Both the rationalistic and the mystic mindset reject a fundamental faith in the sufficiency of Scripture. Whether they turn to their own individual, rational judgment or to a nudging from the Holy Spirit, they filter and add to the meaning of the Bible through an outside source. The hierarchical and majority methods likewise doubt the sufficiency of Scripture, because they doubt the creature's capacity to receive the Creator's revelation, which is a direct reflection on the Creator.

## **Barrier #2 - The Insufficiency of Scripture**

The Bible presents itself as both understandable and our standard of truth. Those who deny that the Bible can be understood in unison by Christians – or even understood individually – are in direct contradiction with the clear wording of Scripture. God expects us to not only understand His Word, but He expects us to obey it and withdraw from those of our number, who teach and practice otherwise (**Romans 16:17-18; II John 9-11**).

7. How would you respond to the statement, “Words **cannot** contain the infinite God!”?
  
8. “I have tried to read and understand the Bible, but I just don't get it!” How would you answer?
  
9. What if someone reacted with, “But, that is your interpretation!”, or “You are so arrogant for thinking you are right!” How would you respond?

Paul declared that “*when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*” (**Ephesians 3:4**), and God “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (**I Timothy 2:3-4**). If the Bible is not understandable, then Paul was wrong and the majority of the New Testament falls with him, as does Peter's epistles (**II Peter 3:15-16**). Furthermore, the Scriptures not only claim to be inspired, but they claim to have all that we need for salvation, life, godliness, and all good works (**II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:2-3; James 1:21-22**). Finally, we are not to “*go beyond*”, “*add to*”, or “*take away from*” the Scriptures in any way (**I Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19; Galatians 1:6-8**). Although some parts may be difficult to understand (**II Peter 3:16-18**), they are not impossible to understand. Diligence, prayer, and continual study are required (**II Timothy 2:15**). Keep in mind that Timothy knew the Scriptures from a youth, travelled with the inspired apostle, Paul, and yet he was still expected to be diligent in reading and study! If Timothy was so expected, how much more are we expected to do the same? God's Word is not only sufficient to enlighten and train us, but it is the “*Sword of the Spirit*”, which we are to use to identify and refute error (**Ephesians 6:10-18; II Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-5; II Corinthians 10:3-5**).

We will examine the finality of God's revelation in the Bible in later sections, when we focus on the errors of latter day revelations and charismatic abuses.

### Barrier #3 – Wrong Standard

10. Pretend you are having a Bible study, and after dealing with a pointed issue, the other person says, “The Holy Spirit helps us interpret Scripture and understand it as intended.” How would you respond?
  
11. If you were talking to a friend, convicting them of some sin, and they responded, “I **feel** this is right,” how would you answer?
  
12. What if you were studying with a schoolmate, and they answered, “My parents and my pastor could answer all of these questions!” What would you say?
  
13. Imagine you were talking to a schoolmate about instrumental music, and they responded, “But, **all** Christians use mechanical instruments in worship!” What would be your answer?

### Required Attitudes and Virtues

Since we can understand God’s Word, and since we will be judged by it (**John 12:48**), it is obviously critical that we develop a full knowledge of it. However, acquiring such knowledge requires fostering attitudes that are receptive to truth. Consider these warnings against prejudicial or deliberate resistance to truth:

- **II Timothy 3:6-8** – “... *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*”
- **Hebrews 10:26-27** – “*If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*”
- **Romans 10:1-3** – “*They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*”
- **Luke 16:15** – “*You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.*”
- **Matthew 13:14-15** – “*Their eyes **they have closed**, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.*”
- **II Thessalonians 2:11-12** – “*For this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*”

A sincere love of truth is absolutely critical to finding truth. The above warnings guarantee that we will **not** find the truth, if we do **not** honestly seek for it. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, this pure, honest, truth-seeking, and humble character is required of all kingdom citizens (**Matthew 5:5-8**). In

interpretation of God's Word, this need is especially evident. Furthermore, such truth seeking will require determination and vigilance, not a few half-hearted gestures (**Matthew 7:7-11; Proverbs 4:4-13; 23:23**). But, if we truly seek, we will find (**John 7:17**).

Now, this openness to truth does *not* require gullibility. Scripture commends those who cross-examined the teachings of even the apostle Paul with established Scripture (**Acts 17:11**). How much more important is this quality for us today? The Bible warns there has been and will be many false teachers and false prophets: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (**I John 4:1**). We are to test them and compare them to the proven standard (**I John 4:2, 6; I Corinthians 14:37-38; Revelation 2:2; Matthew 7:15-20**). Remember, even the Devil can quote and twist Scripture (**Matthew 4:6-7**), and his ministers can present themselves as "*angels of light*" (**II Corinthians 11:14-15**). If we fail to prove whatever we accept, then we are vulnerable to seductive error that is compatible with our prejudices or desires, and this error can destroy us (**Matthew 15:14; II Timothy 4:2-4; II Peter 3:17-19; II Timothy 2:15-18**).

Therefore, one must be careful to possess an open mind while reading any communication, so that he may draw the author's intended meaning out of the text. This process is known as **exegesis**. Inserting meaning into a text or seeing only what we want to see in a text is known as **eisegesis**. Exegesis is continually reinforced in the Bible. One first hears, then learns, next accepts the truth, and finally responds in obedient faith (**Romans 10:17; John 6:45; Acts 2:41**). Nowhere does Scripture advocate a conviction that is first formed and then secondly supported by Bible verses. Yes, learning is an iterative process, and we are always building upon our previously gained knowledge and convictions, but fundamentally and generally, the Bible teaches that conviction should follow the realization of truth, not the other way around.

#### **Barrier #4 – Emotional Escapes**

These questions demonstrate what happens when truth is not one's first love.

14. "As long as you are doing your best, what difference does it make?" Is this a valid justification? Explain.
  
15. Consider someone objecting to your appeal to Scripture with the response, "As long as I do it for God's glory, it does not matter!" What would be your response?
  
16. "So, everyone who disagrees with you is going to hell!?" What would be your response?
  
17. How would you react to the response, "But, Jesus told us to 'judge not, lest you be judged!'?"

## Understanding the Bible

God uses words to communicate with us through the Bible. These words are intellectually processed and interpreted. Therefore, it is essential that we develop careful reading skills, thoughtful listening, and critical thinking to more efficiently and accurately understand God's Word. The majority of these skills and virtues are necessary to understand any text or thoughtful communication; however, the primary application made here will be toward understanding the Bible.

### Reasonable Interpretation of Scripture

If one is to understand the Bible, some level of common sense is presumed. The following rules or suggestions are not defined by Scripture, neither are they peculiar to Scripture. In fact, all thoughtful communication is best understood by the following self-evident rules. Their truthfulness should be obvious upon reading, so that they need not be proven otherwise.

- *Put Everything Together* – Just like the blind men who newly encountered an elephant and judged the whole animal only by the small part each could feel, so we may foolishly judge the whole of God's will by limiting our focus to one part of the Bible. God cannot lie, and He is a God of order, not confusion (**Titus 1:1-3; I Corinthians 14:33**), so we should expect all of God's Word to harmonize, as we would expect from any competent, thoughtful author. Therefore, we need to be careful that we don't jump to any hasty conclusions by ensuring that we first pull together all that God has to say on a subject and then form a conclusion. In some cases, the desired conclusion or principle is directly stated, and the reader is expected to make further application (deduction). In other cases, the reader is expected to induce the general principle underlying the given facts, and from that conclusion, the reader is expected to make further application.
- *Context, Context, Context!* – Perhaps there is no greater rule than to always observe the context of each verse. Most words have multiple meanings, and in fact, many sentences divorced from their context can potentially be interpreted multiple ways. However, the context surrounding words, sentences, and paragraphs helps us narrow the possible meanings to the intended meaning and correct interpretation. Reading, rereading, and reading a passage again is essential to synchronize the relevant portions of the context to discover the correct interpretation. This rule is too frequently acknowledged but overlooked in practice.
- *Let Simple Refine Difficult* – Some passages are more difficult to understand (**II Peter 3:15-18**), and they require more knowledge and experience to understand (**Hebrews 5:13-14**). This may reflect a spiritual problem (for example, "*slow of heart*", meaning a reluctance to accept what is incompatible with our preconceived notions, **Luke 24:25**), or a passage may simply be ambiguous on some point, bearing multiple valid interpretations consistent with its localized context, or the wording may simply be eccentric or unexpected. Regardless of the reason, we should obviously not begin building a conclusion from the whole Bible at the most difficult passages. First establish what cannot be moved (the simpler, clearer passages), and then move the more difficult passages within the boundaries defined by their context until the straight line appears. Otherwise, we may find ourselves warping or discarding clear passages to force them to harmonize with our preferred interpretation of more difficult passages (**II Peter 3:16-17**).

- *Consider Parallel Passages* – Some passages, even some books (for example, **Ephesians** and **Colossians**, or **Matthew** and **Luke**), are very similar in thought and outline, although each passage’s emphasis may be different. These parallel passages can be immediately helpful in understanding the other’s difficult verses. Likewise, some writers quote others. Since the Bible is ultimately written by one Author, these inspired explanations offer the best insight into the Bible. As is often said, the Bible is its own best commentary.
- *Beware Unnecessary Speculation* – The Bible contains all that we need (**II Timothy 3:16-17**; **II Peter 1:2-3**), and what has been given to us, we are expected to master (**Deuteronomy 29:29**); however, there are many things that are not revealed or explained (**Deuteronomy 29:29**). Care should be taken to avoid launching into the deep, taking our chances with things unrevealed and over our head (**Colossians 2:18-19**). Wrangling over such is unprofitable, divisive, and distracting, and it therefore should be avoided (**I Timothy 1:3-7**; **II Timothy 2:14-15**).
- *Beware Allurement of the Fantastic & Mystical* – Akin to the above point, we must avoid the human desire to spin each passage into fantastical stories of the mystical. Unless indicated by the text or otherwise impossible to interpret, the meaning of a text should be taken at face value. There is a simplicity to the gospel, which does not require mystical or super-literary skill, and making more of the text than is readily apparent is a means of great deception (**II Corinthians 11:2-3**; **Colossians 2:6-8**). Although some passages are difficult, the Bible is a book for all. It is *not* reserved for the intellectual (**I Corinthians 1:22-31**).

### **Bible Examples in Careful Reasoning**

18. Explain the reasoning that Jesus expected us to use to move from a recognition of God’s care of the birds and the lilies to a confidence that we would be fed and clothed (**Matthew 6:25-31**).
19. Does Jesus’ promise recorded in **Matthew 7:7-11**, that our seeking will always yield results, apply to all things for which we could seek, or just some specific types of things? How do you know? Also see, **Luke 11:9-13**.
20. Whose priesthood was greater, Levi or Melchizedek? What reasoning does the Hebrew writer use to prove this (**Hebrews 7:4-10**)?
21. How did “Moses show at the burning bush passage that the dead are raised”? What reasoning did Jesus use (**Luke 20:27-40**)?

## Interpreting Figurative Language

Just like any writing of vivid color, the Bible contains some figurative language that is designed to enhance the memorability of its message and emphasize its importance. It is generally obvious, when a writer uses figurative or symbolic language. He may explain that what he saw came in a dream (**Numbers 12:6; Genesis 37:5-11; 42:9; Daniel 7:1**), or he may flatly assert that he saw symbols and signs (**Hosea 12:10; Ezekiel 24:15-24; Revelation 1:1; 12:3**). Occasionally, we are informed that certain stories are parables (**Matthew 13:3-53**), which when understood, make it easier to recognize other parables that are not explicitly labeled as such (**Matthew 13:44-53**). Lastly, some figurative language is obviously recognized, simply because a literal interpretation would be too ridiculous or fantastic (**Luke 13:32; John 10:7-9**). But, unless there is some obvious mark of figurative language, a Bible text should generally be interpreted literally, or at face value, just as we would interpret passages in any other book that are not otherwise prefaced.

In studying the Bible, the following types of figurative language will be encountered and should be understood in general to properly interpret the text:

- *Parable* – A parable is a story that is taken from common life and used to illustrate a similar, less intuitive concept. For example, the parable of the sower with its various types of soils is used to show the various ways men react to the Word of God (**Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23**).
- *Fable* – This is similar to a parable, except the underlying story is unrealistic or unnatural. For example, it may contain talking animals or plants (**II Kings 14:8-10**). The Bible contains (only?) two such fables.
- *Allegory* – Similar to the parable and fable, the allegory is a parallel or illustration, except it is built on historical events. Generally, unless Scripture labels such historical events as parallel to spiritual truths and lessons, they are difficult to identify with any certainty. For example, Paul took Hagar and Sarah as an allegory to the Old and New Covenants (**Galatians 4:21-31**).
- *Apocalyptic* – This is prophetic literature that is largely encoded in symbols that are often fantastic. It reveals later events and some of the spiritual interactions beyond our own realm. The bulk of **Revelation** and **Zechariah**, and portions of **Daniel**, **Ezekiel**, **Isaiah**, and **Joel** would fit into this category. These are the most difficult figures and texts to interpret completely, because they are surrounded with so little literal context, it is difficult to maintain one's bearing, while navigating an interpretive course through the symbols.
- *Simile* – This simple construct compares one thing to another using a relating term, such as “like” or “as”. For example, “*all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass*” (**I Peter 1:24**).
- *Metaphor* – This even simpler construct makes a direct comparison, like a simile, except it does not even use “like” or “as”. For example, Jesus said, “*I am the door: If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved*” (**John 10:9**). Is Jesus literally a door? Obviously, He is not, but He is *like* a door.
- *Metonymy* – This subtler construct uses one part of a collection to represent something closely associated with the figure. For example, Paul tells Christians to “*drink this cup*” (**I Corinthians 11:26-27**). Obviously, he means we should drink the *contents* of the cup, not the container.



- *Synecdoche* – This figure speaks of the whole by only one part, or it speaks of one part by referencing the whole. For example, in **Acts** converts are often referenced as having believed, repented, **or** been baptized (**Acts 17:12; 3:19; 19:5**), but rarely do all parts of conversion occur in any one passage. In such cases, the singular acts stand for the whole of conversion.
- *Hyperbole* – This is simple exaggeration used to emphasize a point. For example, David said, “*I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears*” (**Psalms 6:6**). Did David really cry so much that his bed literally floated away? May there be a literal “*beam*” stuck in our brother’s eye (**Matthew 7:3-5**)?
- *Irony and Sarcasm* – The opposite is stated to emphasize the intended point. It is never intended to hide truth but to pound it. For example, consider Elijah’s taunt to Baal’s priests to cry louder and awaken their sleeping god (**I Kings 18:27**), or Micaiah’s readily offered assurance that Ahab would prosper in battle at the Lord’s hand (**I Kings 22:15-18**). Sarcasm is similar to irony, except sarcasm is uttered with more bitter scorn and contempt.
- *Interrogation or Rhetorical Question* – Asked as a question, but the answer is obvious and the statement is intended to conclude a discussion, not begin it (**John 7:50-51**).
- *Elliptical* – Elliptical expressions have missing words, which are obviously understood, and must be supplied by the reader, but are omitted for succinctness and emphasis. For example, in **II Corinthians 5:21**, Jesus is spoken of as being “*made sin*”. Sin is essentially a verb, not a noun. Jesus could therefore become a sin *offering* or dubiously *sin-ful*, but He could not become sin itself, a transgression of the law. The “*not-but*” construct is another common example of this figure (for example see, **I Corinthians 1:17; John 6:27; 12:44**).
- *Prolepsis* – This is a statement out of time, referring to something as it will eventually be, but not how it is at that time. It refers to the future as present or even past. For example, Judas is spoken of as the one, “*who also betrayed*” Jesus in the past tense, when He would not actually betray Jesus for a few years (**Matthew 10:4**).
- *Personification and Anthropomorphism* – Applying human attributes, such as intellect or body, to inanimate objects, abstract concepts, or even God Himself. For example, we read of the “*finger of God*” and “*God’s right hand*”, yet God is a spirit without a body of flesh (**Luke 11:20; Psalm 98:1; John 4:24; Luke 24:39**).

Besides recognizing these types of figurative language – and there are several more – common sense would dictate the following rules for properly interpreting these figures: (*Note: This is primarily specific application of what we have previously observed in general.*)

- Assume God knew what He was doing in revelation, so keep it simple! Try to interpret everything literally, unless directed or necessitated otherwise by the text.
- Let the author’s own explanation prevail, if provided. Examples include, **Ezekiel 37:13-14** and **Matthew 13:18-23**.
- Let clearer passages refine the meaning of figurative and symbolic language. Do not use dubious interpretations of figurative language to dismiss simpler passages.

- Beware over-interpretation. Do not make the figure mean too much. Do not stretch its meaning beyond the context or its obvious lesson. Otherwise, there is no end to the error that may be introduced by one's imagination.

### Bible Examples of Figurative Language

22. *“Behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:3-4)*, is an example of what kind of figurative language?
23. Some advocate that Christians should only use one cup in the Lord's Supper, because the relevant texts only reference a single cup (for example, **Matthew 26:27**). Could *“the cup”* be a figure of speech for the **contents** of the cup? If so, how do you know from the related contexts, and which type of figure would this be?
24. *“The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray **as soon as they are born, speaking lies**” (Psalm 58:3)*. Are the wicked born able to talk, much less speaking lies? What kind of figure is this? What does this verse **prove** about man's sinfulness from birth?
25. *“Then all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come and reign over us!’”* is an example of what kind of figure? What lesson does **Judges 9:6-20** teach?
26. *“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred” (Hosea 11:8-9)*. Some argue this is anthropomorphism for God, and that He has no real sympathy or pity for man, but rather He is personified like man in this text. Is this a fair argument? How do you know from the context?

### Logical Fallacies

Too frequently we all fall into various, common pitfalls of thought. Some arguments may sound reasonable on the surface, but closer inspection reveals a fatal flaw in reasoning that ultimately demands dismissal. These flaws in thinking are frequently called **logical fallacies**. Although accepting logical fallacies is a danger in any discussion or decision, the spiritual consequence is that we may be unconsciously seduced into accepting destructive error based on a hasty examination. Careful, critical thinking is required to combat such errors.

## Answering Logical Fallacies

Just “as the serpent **deceived** Eve **by his craftiness**, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Corinthians 11:3). Lust, prejudice, ignorance, naiveté, and haste make us extra vulnerable to such deception. However, the Lord did not leave us defenseless. He provides, enhances, and refines our individual love, honesty, knowledge, wisdom, and diligence, so “that we should **no longer be children**, tossed to and fro and carried about with **every wind of doctrine**, by the **trickery** of men, in the cunning **craftiness of deceitful plotting**” (Ephesians 4:14). Through these blessings, we learn the Devil’s “devices ... lest Satan take advantage of us”, and we also equip ourselves with the complete armor of God (II Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:10-18). “Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to **discern both good and evil**” are able to not only digest “solid food”, but they have also learned to “speak the truth in love” and have grown into maturity, becoming less susceptible to the “trickery of men” (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15; II Peter 3:16-18). Furthermore, they are more able to “convict those who contradict ... sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9).

The Bible is a book that requires logic, reason, and thought. Occasionally, this requirement is called out directly (Isaiah 1:18; 41:21; Romans 3:28; 12:1), but the use of logical arguments throughout the Scriptures makes the need obvious. Just as improving our reading skills help us to better understand God’s Word, improving our reasoning skills help us to better understand what it means and how to make fair application. One of the ways we can improve such skills is by identifying how **not** to reason.

### Informal Logical Fallacies as Exemplified in Scripture

The Bible contains not only examples of people **rightly** reasoning and using Scripture, but it also contains examples of people **wrongly** reasoning or using Scripture. The following table introduces various forms of faulty reasoning, also known as informal logical fallacies, while providing common definitions as well as Bible examples. The purpose is not to develop an academic appreciation of logic; rather, our goal is to familiarize ourselves with common patterns in flawed thinking, so that we can more quickly recognize errors in our own thoughts or someone’s words.

Name	Definition	Passage or Example
<i>Hasty Generalization</i>	Jumping to a conclusion based on a limited sample. Applying some characteristic to an entire group based on a few members.	<b>John 18:37-38; Malachi 1:2, 6</b>
<i>False Cause (post hoc)</i>	Assuming that one event is caused by a preceding event, just because it happened to follow the first.	<b>Jeremiah 44:17-23; Isaiah 36:7</b>
<i>Slippery Slope</i>	Appeal through fear that taking one step will lead to another, and eventually a disastrous end. Assumes that the process cannot be duly stopped.	“Requiring baptism for salvation will lead to the doctrine of salvation by works and uncertainty about one’s personal salvation.”
<i>Weak Analogy</i>	After establishing some similarities between two issues, and after showing a desired outcome in one, a similar outcome is assumed in the other.	<b>Ezekiel 18:1-4</b>
<i>Appeal to Authority</i>	A conclusion is assumed based on the witness of an assumed authority.	<b>Matthew 15:1-9; John 7:47-48</b> ; “Our church says...”;

<b>Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Passage or Example</b>
<i>Ad populum</i>	The opinion or action of the majority of people (the populous) is assumed to be true or best.	“Most people do not believe in hell.”
<i>Ad hominem</i>	The opponent’s argument is represented as invalid by attacking the man and not his argument (i.e., ad hominem – “against the man” vs “answering his argument”).	<b>Luke 7:33-34; John 9:28-34</b>
<i>Appeal to Emotion</i>	Argument is based on pulling someone's heart-strings, by making them feel sorry, fear, guilt, or pity for the opponent or conclusion.	<b>John 19:12-13</b>
<i>Appeal to Ignorance</i>	Assumes that a position is true, just because the other side cannot prove his case, or just because there is no evidence contrary to one's position. A failure to refute is assumed to prove one’s own case.	<b>Matthew 22:23-33; Malachi 2:17</b>
<i>Straw Man</i>	The opponent's argument is anticipated but misrepresented and then easily answered. This leaves a false impression of answering the opponent's true argument.	<b>Ezekiel 33:10-11</b>
<i>Red Herring</i>	Diverting attention from the original or real argument by raising a tangential discussion.	<b>Genesis 3:4-5; Acts 23:6-10*</b> (* Incidental)
<i>False Dichotomy</i>	Presentation of a dilemma with only two extreme positions, denying the possibility of a “middle ground”. After eliminating one possibility, the other is assumed, because it is assumed there are no other valid alternatives.	<b>Matthew 22:15-22</b>
<i>Circular Reasoning</i>	Defines terms so that the conclusion is built into the premise. It is also known as “begging the question”.	<i>“The Bible says it's from God, so it must be.”</i>
<i>Equivocation</i>	A vague or inconsistent usage of a term or phrase in an argument, which allows it to be used multiple ways. The arguer switches back and forth as needed to avoid being “pinned down”.	<b>Genesis 3:4-5</b> (? “surely die”)
<i>Non sequitur</i>	A generic description of any claim that logically “does not follow” from its premises. Any form of “jumping to a conclusion”.	<b>Mark 2:5-12; John 10:30-38</b>
<i>Scoffing</i>	By simply brow-beating or ridiculing an opponent until he caves under the pressure and humiliation.	<b>II Peter 3:3-6; Proverbs 9:7-8; 15:12; John 7:49</b>
<i>Poisoning the Well</i>	Presentation of prejudicial information against a conclusion or about a speaker, before they can present.	<b>John 1:45-46</b>

## Barrier #5 – Careless Reasoning (Identifying Logical Fallacies)

Identify and explain the error (or errors) of the following logical fallacies:

27. “If we permit ladies’ classes, they may want to have them at the building, and if they have them at the building, they may use the auditorium, and if they use the auditorium, they may use the pulpit, and if they use the pulpit, they will want to become preachers! Therefore, we should not have ladies’ classes.”
28. *“Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ And they were offended at Him.” (Mark 6:3)*
29. “My preacher said that baptism was an outward sign of an inward grace, so I don't have to be baptized to be saved, because I am saved already!”
30. *“And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? – as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just” (Romans 3:8).*
31. “No **real** scientist believes in God!”

## References

The substance of much of this material for this section can be found in several works. The following have been very helpful in preparing this section of the study guide:

- Adams, Wilson, *Fast Facts About False Teachings*, Tops Printing, Bryan, Texas, 2010.
- Barnett, Maurice James, *By What Authority, The Scheme of Redemption, Vol, 3*, Maurice Barnett, Phoenix, Arizona, 2005.
- Dungan, D. R., *Hermeneutics*, Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight, Arkansas.
- Harkrider, Robert, *Basic Bible Doctrine, Books 1-4*, Impressive Image Production, Russellville, Alabama, 1987.
- Jenkins, Ferrell, *Introduction to Christian Evidences*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1989.

The naming and identification of logical fallacies is a common topic on the internet. Among interested sites, the above definitions for logical fallacies would be considered “common knowledge”.

## 2. Catholicism

In years gone past, no belief system would have received more attention than Catholicism. It was a dominant political power controlling every aspect of its members' lives. However, the Catholic Church is not so influential now – especially in our locale, and it will therefore receive less attention in our class.

Even though Catholicism's power has waned somewhat, it is still worthy of some study for 3 reasons:

- *Local Application* – Even in our city, there is a Catholic church.
- *Typical Institutional Authority* – The loyalty of Catholics to their institution and its authority figures – in spite of its staggering failings – is typical of other faiths we will survey.
- *Sleeping Giant* – The Catholic Church's "syllabus" denounces states' rights to freedom of religion, public schools, and self-rule (pope Pius IX, 1864; Vatican Council, 1870). This syllabus grants all temporal powers – religious, civil, and political – to the Catholic Church.

### A Flawed Standard

Catholicism is the perfect example of what happens to believers, who consciously follow **another standard** beside God's Word (the Bible) for extended time: The living institution – the church itself – becomes the most important authority. Generally, Catholicism would recognize 3 **equal** legs of authority:

- *Holy Scripture* – This is what we recognize as the Bible. However, Catholics would contend this represented only one part of God's revelation. Arguably, their actions indicate it is the least important.
- *Sacred Tradition* – Catholicism maintains that much of the original revelation was preserved in oral tradition, which was preached and passed from one generation to another. In some cases these traditions were not *canonized* (recognized as church rule) until **much** later than the first century.
- *Living Magisterium* – This essentially represents the ongoing legislative and decisive power of the Catholic Church to define a single unified faith. To Catholics, the magisterium is simply the power to "teach" – although we might add, "decisively and exclusively". The pope, Vatican councils, and the episcopacy would be the most prominent members of this essentially authoritative branch.

Upon these 3 **equal** legs of authority the Catholic Church rests. Eliminating any of the 3 legs will surely result in the logical fall of the Catholic Church. Following our goal of "*laying the axe to the root of the tree*", our study will focus on this fundamental point of division – their flawed standard (**Mat. 15:1-9**).

### The Pope

The office of Pope (Latin, *papa* – Father) is nowhere to be found in Scripture, but it exists according to the late testimony of *Sacred Tradition* and the ongoing will of the *Magisterium*. Identifying this office as error would necessarily identify the supportive sources also as error, the *Sacred Tradition* and the *Living Magisterium*, and it would eliminate the claim to institutional authority for the Catholic Church.

1. Is there anything wrong with the Pope's title of *Papa*, or "Father"? Please reconcile your answer with the Scriptural precedent established by **I Corinthians 4:17; Philipians 2:22; I Timothy 1:2, 18; II Timothy 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4; Philemon 10.**
2. Where are the qualifications for a pope given in Scripture? How does this compare with other officers of the church?
3. Catholics look to Peter as their first pope. According to the Bible, why does he not meet their qualifications of a being a pope?
4. If you were speaking to a Catholic friend, and she said, "In **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus said He would build His church upon the foundation of Peter, and He gave Peter special powers (i.e., keys, forgiveness) indicating he would be the first Pope." How would you respond?

### **The Sufficiency of Scripture**

5. Explain at least one passage that teaches latter revelations could not contradict established revelation?
6. Explain at least one passage that teaches revelation would **not** be continually given throughout the ages?
7. Explain at least one passage that teaches we have all that we need in Scripture.
8. Explain at least one passage that teaches we can understand Scripture.
9. How would you answer? "The Catholic Church gave you the Bible. You would have no Bible without the Catholic Church!"

# 3. Calvinism

## Introduction

“Calvinism” is a tightly-knit, logical system of beliefs that attempts to explain man’s justification as accomplished entirely by an absolutely sovereign god, thereby denying man’s free-will. The doctrine is most popularly known according to its most successful organizer, John Calvin (1509-1564), who was extremely influential during the Protestant Reformation. He converted at age 24 (1533), and published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536 at age 27.

The most well-known opponent of John Calvin’s doctrine was Jacobius Arminius (1560-1609). After Arminius’ death, in 1610 his followers formalized his teachings, which prompted the Calvinists’ counter-response at the Synod of Dort in 1618. That synod’s response forms the well-known acronym, **TULIP**:

- **T**otal Inherited Depravity
- **U**nconditional Election
- **L**imited Atonement
- **I**rresistible Grace
- **P**erseverance of the Saints

Calvin’s doctrines are most influential in the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; however, many other denominations have also been greatly influenced by this theology and system of justification. Even groups that do not accept all 5-points of Calvinism’s **TULIP** may still hold to “salvation by faith alone”, “Holy Spirit leading”, and “once saved, always saved”, which are all derived from **TULIP**. Because this doctrine is so far-reaching, because it pertains to the most central issue of our salvation, and because it is prevalent in our locale, we will concentrate on this one doctrine for additional classes.

Incidentally, John Calvin was not the first to teach this doctrine. Augustine (AD 354-430), Bishop of Hippo, was an early advocate of “original sin”, man’s depravity, infant baptism, and efficacious grace, predestination, and God’s Supremacy. The Catholic Church considers him a saint, a pillar, and a doctor, some say 2<sup>nd</sup> to Paul the apostle. Augustine was opposed by Pelagius (AD 354-420/440), who taught that man was basically good and could choose to do good without the direct working of grace. But, in addition to disavowing inherited depravity, he also taught that Jesus’ death was merely exemplary, not atoning. He was condemned as a heretic in AD 431. His writings are lost to history, except for their preservation as quotations in Augustine’s writings.

Calvinism has a deeply philosophical element, because it focuses so much on God’s nature and man’s nature, which drives much of the prejudice for its Bible interpretation and conclusions. Consequently, some terms are introduced here, which are not necessary to understand and answer the error, but understanding them may prove helpful in discussions. However, despite its philosophical roots, Calvinists look to the Bible as their sole authority, which is another reason for the extra focus here.

## Note on Questions

All the questions in this section represent real-world, worst-case arguments from Calvinists. Most Calvinists will **not** be anywhere near this hostile. However, if you are prepared for the most emotionally charged questions, then you will be more than prepared for patient inquiries. Do not forget: “A soft answer turns away wrath” (**Proverbs 15:1**). ☺ Please answer each question as best as you can.



## Barriers to Study and Unity

These questions can mostly be answered using what we have already learned; however, they do present a unique twist or a specific application, which bears additional consideration here:

1. “Calvin’s theology has been **the** definition of orthodoxy since the early church! How can you believe such a heretical, liberal view?”
2. “God is absolutely sovereign, but man is absolutely responsible for his sins. This is a divine paradox and mystery. It cannot be understood or reconciled by our limited human mind, but it must be accepted and believed. Who are we to question God (**Romans 9:20**)?”
3. “Ahhh, pshaw, this is a completely academic discussion. People have been arguing about this for hundreds of years. We will never be able to settle this. We can ask God to explain this when we get to heaven, but otherwise, don’t worry about it.”

## Sovereignty

Calvinism is logically built upon 2 assumptions:

- God is the supreme and sovereign will, which eliminates any room for other free wills.
- All of Adam’s descendants are born with the accumulated guilt **and** depravity of their ancestors.

As far as I can tell, these 2 pillars of Calvinism do not depend on each other, except indirectly: As Sovereign, God chose that Adam would sin, thereby condemning the entire race. Regardless of the connection, these 2 premises both logically lead to the elimination of man’s free will. Whether God controls man’s thoughts, or whether man’s thoughts are controlled by his depravity, either way or both, man has no free will according to Calvinism.

Many have described God’s absolute “Sovereignty” as the “soil from which Calvin’s TULIP springs”. Certainly, as you study with others, you will see the influence it has on Calvinists to praise His Sovereignty and hastily reject anything that takes away from His sovereignty or rivals it in any way.

The key philosophical assumption to recognize is that Calvinists deny God’s ability or freedom to tolerate others’ freedom of will. (He is too “infinite” for that possibility to exist in their mind.) This is one place where their philosophical prejudice is most clearly seen.

4. “You do not believe in the sovereignty of God! Calvinism elevates God by magnifying His sovereignty, whereas you blaspheme Him with your arrogant notions of free-will!”
  
5. “The Bible **clearly** teaches that God predestined us, **then** called us, and **then** justified us (**Romans 8:29-30**). Therefore, we were predestined **before** being saved based on His good pleasure – not our own (**Ephesians 1:3-11**)!”
  
6. “**John 1:12-13** clearly states that our salvation has **nothing** to do with our will. We are saved **entirely** by God’s will!”
  
7. **Bonus:** “Do you believe God is omniscient, that He knows everything? If so, would He not know your sins even before you commit them? Therefore, do you not **have** to sin; otherwise, God would be wrong? Does not God’s foreknowledge of your sins predestine you to sin?”

## **Total Inherited Depravity**

According to Calvinists, as a result of Adam’s sin, all of his descendants have inherited the guilt of his sin. Therefore, they are born as sinners, guilty, and damned before God. This is the notion of “original sin”, which is also held by the Catholic Church. (Incidentally, this is the doctrine that produced the need for infant baptism.) However, Calvinists go on to teach that man also inherited moral depravity, that is a lowered spiritual state with a preference for sin over righteousness (similar to the “*reprobate mind*” of **Romans 1:21-32**). Furthermore, they teach that this inherited depravity was total. In other words, we are born not just with the taste for sin, but with a completely darkened mind. We are wholly unable to choose or even consider otherwise. We are entirely given over to unavoidable and gross evil – from birth, or so Calvinism teaches.

8. “**Jeremiah 17:9** says that man’s heart is ‘*deceitful above all, and desperately wicked*’. So, how can you say we have the ability to choose that which is good?”

9. “**Romans 3:10-12** clearly says, *‘There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God’*. So, who does that leave available with the ability to look for God, much less choose to follow Him?”
10. “The Psalmist plainly declares that he was born sinful, *‘Surely I was **sinful at birth**, sinful from the time my mother conceived me’* (**Psalm 51:5**, NIV). How can you say we were born otherwise?”
11. “Paul taught in **Romans 5:12-21** that all men were condemned by Adam’s sin, and sin reigned over all generations because of one man’s offense!”
12. “No, you misunderstand. I do not believe that I am born a sinner – only sinful. I was not born guilty of sin – only conditioned to sin.”

## Unconditional Election

According to Calvinism, as a result of our depravity and God’s sovereignty, man is completely unable to respond to any gospel invitation. Therefore, if any men are to be saved, there would be no conditions, because man is incapable of responding, much less satisfying any conditions. Consequently, if any men are saved, then God must choose or “elect” them to be saved. Therefore, Calvinists refer to God’s choosing without man’s participation as “unconditional election”.

Naturally, if man is incapable of choosing, then when God chooses who will be saved, He necessarily chooses who will **not** be saved. This is often referred to as “double election” or “double predestination”, since He chooses the fate of the saved and the damned.

Occasionally, Calvinists will refer to detractors as **synergists**, or proponents of **synergism**. This comes from 2 Greek words: “erg”, meaning “to work”, and “syn”, meaning “together”. So, synergism is the notion of multiple parties “working together”. This term is applied because opponents believe that salvation involves men “working together” with God; whereas, Calvinists would be considered as proponents of **monergism**, because in Calvinism, only God is working. Man does nothing.

13. “Your faith is directly instilled by God. Does not **Ephesians 2:8-10** teach that **even** your faith is given to you, apart from your works, and worked by God? We are not saved by anything we do (**II Timothy 1:9!**)”
14. “How can you deny that Jesus ‘finished’ our salvation on the cross (**John 19:30!**)? BTW, the word, ‘finish’, is an accounting term meaning, ‘paid for, in full!’”
15. “Are you spiritually alive or dead before being saved? What can dead people do for themselves, especially people born that way (see **Ephesians 2:1-3!**)?”

## Limited Atonement

By Calvinism, if God chose a select group to be saved, then necessarily Christ’s sacrifice was only intended for those chosen, the elect. This necessarily means that Jesus did not really die for everyone’s potential atonement. He only died for those who would be saved.

16. “Jesus gave His life a ransom for ‘**many**’, not ‘all’ (**Mark 10:45**), so why do you think He gave His life for all?”
17. “Jesus gave His life for His sheep, His friends, and the church – no one else (**John 10:11, 15; 15:13; Ephesians 5:25!**)! Why are you suggesting otherwise?”

## Irresistible Grace

According to Calvinism, since all men are completely depraved and unable to recognize – much less respond to the gospel call, God must provide some direct means of reaching even the most desperate and hard-hearted soul, which does not depend upon anything in man. For this cause, God elected the

Holy Spirit to directly operate on man to open his heart and ensure that He responds. Furthermore, this operation of grace must be *irresistible*; otherwise, some of the elect might choose otherwise, thereby thwarting God's plan, which cannot happen if He is indeed all sovereign.

Calvinists often refer to this as **efficacious** grace, meaning that it **will** be effective. This suggests that God's grace will not fail to effect the salvation of whomever God desires to be saved. This can be contrasted with the notion of **prevenient** grace, which means that God's grace "went before" or preceded man's choice and is equally available to all. This indicates that God does the first work, but man may still resist, because additional work is required by him.

18. "We are only saved by the miraculous, direct 'dragging' of the Holy Spirit of God (**John 6:37, 44-45, 65**)."

19. "For example, God directly opened Lydia's heart before hearing the gospel! (**Acts 16:14**)"

20. "But, Paul tells us that, *"the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (**I Corinthians 2:14**). Therefore, we **cannot** know God's will without the direct operation of the Holy Spirit!"

21. "It's inconceivable that man could ever resist God!" Or, asked another way, "A God that tries and fails is no God at all!" (In other words, "If God wants us to be saved, and tries to save us, and yet we reject Him, then He is not very 'powerful', is He?")

## **Perseverance of the Saints**

Lastly, according to Calvin's theology, if God has elected unconditionally who will be saved, and if God's will cannot be thwarted or His Holy Spirit rejected, then whatever means restored man will certainly be sufficient to keep man. Furthermore, according to Calvinists, the number of the elect cannot be diminished even by one, so the elect **must** persevere to the end. They will not apostatize so as to be lost eternally. Either, they will eventually return and confirm their election, or they will remain apostatized, revealing their eternal reprobation.

22. “**Nothing** can remove us from God’s hand, so how can we ever be lost, once we are in God’s hand (**John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39**). Are you **stronger** than God?”
23. “Jesus said He would never cast us out, no matter what (**John 6:37**)! Why do you say otherwise?”

## Understanding Romans 9

The epistle of **Romans** is frequently misunderstood, misused, and abused by Calvinists. R. C. Sproul, one of the most influential and vocal Calvinists of our day, is noted for saying that **Romans 9** not only converted him to Calvinism, but it is also unanswerable! A cursory scan of the chapter in the light of a Calvinistic discussion might make one wonder if Sproul is not correct. However, a patient, considerate analysis of the chapter – especially in all of its contexts – shows the clear meaning of the passage, and that it even refutes Calvinism. (We will devote almost an entire class to analyzing this one chapter.)

24. “In **Romans 9:11-13**, Paul says that the election is ‘*not of works, but of Him who calls*’, and as an example, he also says that Jacob and Esau were predestined ‘*not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil!*’”
25. “**Romans 9:15-18** teaches that God saves whoever **He wants** to save, regardless of what **we want or will!**”
26. “You may think that Calvinism appears unfair, but **Romans 9:19-20** teaches that we have no right to question God, which is what you are doing!”
27. “Does not **Romans 9:21-23** flatly say that God created some people for the **sole purpose** of **destruction**, while others were created simply so He could **demonstrate His mercy** and bring them to glory?”

## Imputation of Sin and Righteousness

Calvinism stresses the notion that the all Christians' sins were transferred to Jesus' account some time before the crucifixion. Therefore, as the doctrine goes, when God looked at Jesus on the cross, He saw the vilest sinner there ever was or ever could be. This supposedly led to the Father spiritually turning His back on the Son, which prompted Jesus to cry in despair, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (**Matthew 27:46**). Likewise, Jesus' righteousness was supposedly transferred to our account and covers us like a robe or umbrella, which allows God to justify us, even though we may continue in sin, because He only sees Jesus' righteousness instead of our sins. This two-way imputation is the mechanism by which Calvin *legally* explained our justification and the "perseverance of the saints". Many who are not Calvinists have adopted this prevalent language, and they are unaware of the logical baggage that comes with it.

28. "**Romans 4:8** says that imputation is the way our sins are removed, so why are you undermining a valid Bible word, concept, and theme that is so full of comfort?"

29. "Did not **Isaiah 53:11** say that Jesus would '*bear their iniquities*'? And, does not **I Peter 2:24** say that Jesus '*bore our sins in His own body on the tree*'? Then, how did He '*bear our sins*', if they were not transferred to Him?"

30. "Paul clearly says that Jesus "*became sin*" for us (**II Corinthians 5:21**). He was so sinful that He was regarded as wicked as sin itself! How more sinful can a person be?"

## Conclusion

Imagine that you had a chance encounter with a Calvinist at a doctor's office, while you were both waiting. Please further suppose that you had only 5 minutes before one of you would be called back, and you would never see each other again.

31. What would be your most succinct approach to get a Calvinist thinking about his or her convictions and keep them thinking about the truth found in God's Word? Try to condense your response to 1-3 Bible passages.

## References

The substance of much of this material for this section can be found in several works. The following have been very helpful in preparing this section of the study guide:

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## 4. Seventh Day Sabbath Keepers

By Brad Collins

### Introduction

While there are other groups who teach that the divinely prescribed weekly day of worship is Saturday (e.g., Seventh Day Baptists), the most common seventh day proponents in these parts are the Seventh Day Adventists. The fundamental flaw in the doctrine of Seventh Day Adventists and other Sabbath keepers, or Sabbatarians, is a failure to recognize the complete abrogation (repeal) of the Law of Moses with its fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ (**Matthew 5:7; Ephesians 2:15**) and the establishment of the New Covenant in His blood (**Luke 22:20**). Consequently Sabbatarians find not only a requirement to worship on Saturday instead of Sunday (some Seventh Day Adventists stridently referring to Sunday worship as “the mark of the Beast”), but also some authority for the dietary restrictions (**Leviticus 11**) that God imposed on Israel. Some seventh day groups even observe the feasts of the Law of Moses.

There are doctrines not peculiar to seventh day churches that some, but not necessarily all, Sabbatarian groups hold besides clinging to portions of the Old Law. For example, Seventh Day Baptists apparently teach that baptism is not essential for salvation. Seventh Day Adventists believe in Premillennialism and teach that the wicked are annihilated instead of suffering an eternal torment in hell. We will confine our studies to the Sabbath question that is peculiar to Sabbath keeping churches and their misunderstanding of how the New Covenant has completely taken the place of the Old Covenant.

At the same time, though we will be applying the scriptures we consider primarily to the question of the Sabbath, the foundation we lay is useful in dealing with other doctrines and practices that are commonly defended by resting on evidence in the Old Covenant. For instance, the unscriptural liberty of using instruments of music in worship (a practice almost universal among the denominations) and the improper binding of the tithe both collapse if the Old Covenant is not in force in the Christian era. Seventh day groups are just more (though not entirely) consistent in applying the Old Law than other denominations.

### Zeal Without Knowledge

As with many persons in the denominations, Sabbath keepers have the right motivation, but the wrong information. If you suggest to the Sabbatarian that we are not responsible to keep the Sabbath because the 10 Commandments were set aside when Jesus died on the cross, you may be accused of being a liberal who thinks we have no divinely prescribed standard of behavior. Most Sabbath keepers are concerned with the declining morals in the culture around them. They see any question of the authority of the 10 Commandments as an attack on the very idea that **any** divine law is in force. Of course, that does not describe us at all: we are likewise troubled by the moral relativism in our culture. We believe, as any Sabbatarian does, that God has a high standard of morality that He expects us to live by. Our disagreement is exactly what that standard is.

Similarly, the Sabbath keeper has a deep respect for God and His divine authority and sees the idea of a change of law or covenant as an attempt to undermine that authority. We would certainly agree that the Christian is to hold God in deep reverence and respect His authority as absolute. Nevertheless we

argue that it is not undermining God’s authority to recognize that God Himself proclaimed that He would establish a new and different covenant with Israel (**Jeremiah 31:31–34**), and that the Holy Spirit characterized the old covenant as “*obsolete*” and “*ready to vanish away*” (**Hebrews 8:13**).

## The Ten Commandments

Part of the impediment to Sabbath keepers’ understanding of the role of the Old Covenant is their veneration and elevation of the Ten Commandments. They see a law “*written with finger of God*”, as a Sabbatarian will frequently remind you, as timeless and universal. Sabbath keepers see the Old Law as two parts of a whole: a **moral** law encapsulated in the Ten Commandments and a **ceremonial** law comprising the Levitical system of animal sacrifices and tabernacle/temple worship. The doctrine in seventh day churches is that Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross, did fulfill and remove the ceremonial law, but not the moral law because it has been the same for all time. Since then, as the argument goes, the Ten Commandments are forever, then the command to remember and observe the seventh-day Sabbath—the Fourth of those Ten Commandments—is also in force from creation all the way through the Christian era, even in heaven itself in eternity. While it may be useful to categorize and group any large body of information for the purpose of focusing a discussion or seeing the whole picture on a certain topic (the Law of Moses is certainly no exception), we will see from the Scriptures that the moral/ceremonial compartmentalization of the Old Covenant is a false one, wholly unknown to the penmen of both the Old Testament and the New—indeed to the Holy Spirit Himself!

Let us then examine, in the question-answer format we have been using, the Scriptural case for the idea that the New Law of Christ entirely supersedes the Old Law of Moses. If that concept is true, then any portion of the Law of Moses not repeated in the Law of Christ is not only unrequired of Christians, but is sinful for anyone to bind on another person today.

## Questions

Each of the following questions or charges addresses a slightly different aspect of Sabbatarian thought. I have personally heard most if not all of them in discussion with an advocate of the seventh-day Sabbath. As in previous lessons, each is presented in strident terms as a worst-case scenario. Anyone you talk to is likely to be less abrasive in his/her approach. Let us remember in any case to season our responses with salt (**Colossians 4:6**).

## Defending Sabbath Keeping

1. “How can you say that we should not keep the Sabbath? It’s one of the **Ten Commandments!** **I John 2:3, 4** say, ‘*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His **commandments**. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His **commandments**, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*’ Just what **commandments** do you think he’s talking about?”
2. “But God wrote the Ten Commandments in stone **with His own finger (Exodus 31:18)**! Why would God change the Sabbath, which He clearly intended to be permanent?”

3. “Genesis makes it very clear that God established the Sabbath at creation: ‘*Then God **blessed the seventh day and sanctified it**, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*’ (**Genesis 2:3**). The Sabbath is for all time!”
  
4. “God does not change (**Hebrews 13:8**); therefore **His law** does not change!”
  
5. “God Himself said that the Sabbath was ‘*perpetual*’ and ‘*forever*’ (**Exodus 31:16, 17**). Last time I checked, ‘forever’ means ‘until the end of time!’”
  
6. “Jesus didn’t destroy the Law; He fulfilled it. He even said that the Law would last ‘*till heaven and earth pass away*’ (**Matthew 5:17, 18**). It’s ridiculous to suggest that we are not obligated to rest on the Sabbath!”
  
7. “Not only are we to keep the Sabbath until the end of time, but Isaiah says we’ll be **keeping it in heaven** (**Isaiah 66:22, 23**)! If we’re to keep the Sabbath throughout eternity, you can’t possibly think it’s right for us to just ignore it now!”
  
8. “What about **Matthew 24**? (See v. 20) Christians will be **keeping the Sabbath to the very end!**”

9. “Even **Paul rested on the Sabbath during his preaching journeys (Acts 17:2)**. How can you think we should not do the same thing today?”
10. “The Greek word in **Colossians 2:16** is *sabbaton* (σαββάτων). That means “**Sabbaths**” (**plural**), not “*Sabbath*” (singular). Read **Leviticus 23:23–38**; God calls the **yearly feast days** “*Sabbath days*”. Paul is making **no reference whatsoever to the weekly Sabbath!**”
11. “**Nothing in Paul’s writings** or anything in the New Testament can **erase the Old Testament**. That would **make God a liar!**”

### **Attacking Sunday Worship**

12. “The so-called ‘**Christian Sabbath**’ is not Sunday! The only Sabbath is **God’s Sabbath**: the seventh day Sabbath. The only reason anyone worships on Sunday is because **the Pope**, in his arrogance, changed it centuries ago to cater to pagans!”
13. “Just because **Acts 20:7** talks about ‘*breaking bread*’, it does not prove that God changed the Sabbath. **Acts 2:46** says that they **broke bread daily** from house to house. Besides, if you keep reading in **Acts 20**, the meeting **took place at night**, and **Paul preached till daybreak**. If you’re going to be consistent, you have to **meet at night, all night, every night!**”

14. “**I Corinthians 16:2** makes absolutely **no reference whatsoever to a public meeting** or church service for when Paul arrives. Furthermore, the text reads, ‘*lay something aside*’. That’s talking about **setting something aside at home**, not in some fictitious Sunday worship assembly!”

## References

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- “Fundamental Beliefs.” *Adventist.org: The Official Site of the Seventh-day Adventist world church*. 27 February 2013 <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.

## 5. Common Denominational Errors

What is a “denomination”? The [Oxford dictionary](#) provides this definition:

**Denomination** – *noun*:

1. recognized autonomous branch of the Christian Church:  
*the Presbyterian community is the second-largest denomination in the country*
  - a branch of any religion:  
*Orthodox Jewish denominations*
2. the face value of a banknote, coin, or postage stamp:  
[as modifier]:  
*high-denomination banknotes*
  - the rank of a playing card within a suit, or of a suit relative to others:  
*two cards of the same denomination*
3. *formal* a name or designation.
  - [mass noun] the action of naming or classifying something:  
*the denomination of a consideration as relevant or irrelevant*

The root meaning is associated with the generic naming, classification, or categorization of any kind of thing. However, in our time the word has become most strongly associated with the classification of churches according to their faith, hierarchy, and legal entities, such that it has become the most common usage of the word.

That the body of all people who call themselves “Christian” can be subdivided into various groups according to their beliefs, traditions, practices, hierarchy, and governing boards is no surprise, neither would it be sinful to recognize the obvious distinctions. The central issue is not whether we should recognize such divisions, but rather the issue is whether such division is acceptable to the Lord and whether it should be acceptable to us. For this class, we will define **denominationalism** as more than the pragmatic recognition of differences, but as the spiritual acceptance and approval of denominational division, which thereby assumes each denomination has equal standing before the Lord. Frequently, denominations that hold such views will jointly participate in various ecumenical or charitable events.

### Church Organization and Unity

Although beyond the scope of this study, the following passages should be studied to help understand fundamental facts about church organization and denominational unity:

- The Greek word for “church”, *ekklesia* (“called out”), is inherently a generic word that simply means an “assembly” or “congregation”, as used in **Acts 19:32, 39, 41; 7:38**.
- The Bible speaks of there being one church, a single universal body of all the saved in Christ – **Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-7; 5:23-27; Hebrews 12:22-23**.
- One must be in this church to be saved – **Acts 2:47; 20:28; Galatians 3:26-27**.
- The universal church is comprised of saved individuals as recognized by the Lord, **not** denominations, local churches, or any other intermediary organization – **Acts 2:41, 47**.

- Therefore, there is no intermediary organization that can prevent salvation, and there is no intermediary organization that can guarantee salvation – **II Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12; III John 9-10.**
- A local group of such people also meet regularly and work together, which is often called a “**local church**”, in contrast to the one “**universal church**” – **II Thessalonians 1:1; I Corinthians 1:2; 14:19; Romans 16:16; Revelations 2-3.**
- The Bible pattern for local churches is general autonomy:
  - Exception: Benevolent aid was sent to the elders of local churches that were overwhelmed with local unmet needs – **Acts 11:27-30; I Corinthians 16:1-4; Romans 15:25-27; II Corinthians 8-9.**
  - Evangelism beyond a local church was supported by directly assisting an evangelist, not an institution, local church, or any other intermediary – **II Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:14-18.**
  - The oversight and rule of a local church’s elders was limited to their local flock – **Acts 14:23; I Peter 5:1-3.** It did not extend to other churches.
- Unity is an important goal at both the local level and beyond – **I Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:1-7.**
- Neither can division be resolved nor unity be enjoyed, where clear departure from God’s Word is tolerated – **I Timothy 4:1-3; I Corinthians 11:18-19; 14:33; I Peter 4:11.**
- Fellowship is not to be extended to false teachers or to those stubbornly living in sin; otherwise, “*a little leaven leavens the whole lump*” and one becomes sharer in the false teacher’s deeds – **II John 9-11; I Corinthians 5:1-13; Romans 16:17-18; II Timothy 3:1-8.**

It would be beneficial to explore these topics in more detail or to study various doctrines that are commonly taught by most denominations, which are contrary to Scripture and force unnecessary division. However, for the sake of time, this work will be limited to an overview of the instrumental music question.

## **Instrumental Music in Worship**

Mechanical instruments are used to worship God by the vast number of believers today wearing the name of Christ. Even popular music of all kinds is generally dominated by accompanying instruments of music. As denominations seek to attract more people of the world using the world’s tools, rocking “contemporary” worship is increasingly becoming the norm. Even among those who would associate with “churches of Christ”, there is a growing reluctance to denounce the practice publicly, relegating it to categories of personal opinion or despairing complexity. Therefore, with ongoing and even renewed pressure, from without and within, it is critical that we reexamine this key issue of distinction.

The following questions represent real-world challenges that you may face. You should be able to answer many of these questions by applying lessons already learned in this class.

### **Peer Pressure**

1. “But, **everybody** uses instrumental music to worship God?”

## Respecting Bible Silence

2. “But, the Bible does **not forbid** using mechanical instruments to praise God! You are arguing from silence, and nothing can be proved by silence.”
3. “**Romans 4:15** and **5:13** teach that there is no transgression, where there is no law. God has no law against instrumental music, so it cannot be considered a transgression.”
4. “Paul’s words are not commanded, because they are not preceded by the phrase, ‘*Thou shalt*’ or ‘*You must*’. Since Paul did **not** strictly command us to sing, we are not obligated to avoid mechanical instruments.”

## Authority of Old versus New Testaments

5. “The Hebrews used mechanical instruments in their praise to God. In fact, the Bible **commands** us to use instruments (**Psalm 147:1, 7; 149:1, 3, 5; 150:3-4!**)”

## Seeking New Testament Permission

6. “Both Greek words, *psallo* and *psalmos*, are **commanded** in **Colossians 3:16** and **Ephesians 5:19**. Both of these Greek words include the idea of instrumental music associated with the Hebrews’ book of Psalms. Therefore, instrumental music is **inherently authorized** in the command to sing **psalms!**”
7. “If your church really sings the OT ‘psalms’, and if we do not want to disrespect God’s Word by ignoring **any** one of them, would it not be a contradiction to sing about the ‘sound’ of an instrument praising God and then turn around and also argue for no instruments in worship? I suppose you could give a very lengthy explanation periodically to the congregation, but it would seem so strange to sing about it – especially since many of these OT verses are in the form of a command – but reject instruments in worship!”



8. “The New Testament book of **Revelation** contains numerous references to instrumental music being employed by the saints around God’s throne. If mechanical instruments will be used in heaven, why can they not be used now?”
  
9. “Mechanical instruments are just an **aid** to God’s command to sing. Therefore, the instrument is authorized as an **expediency** to the command to sing.”

### **Emotional Escape**

10. “How can it be wrong to praise God using my **gift** given by God? I have **seen** people healed by the music that I have played unto the Lord. I have **felt** and **witnessed** the power of God’s Spirit through my music, and I know others have also. How can something so bad produce so much good?”

### **References**

The substance of much of this material for this section can be found in several works. The following have been very helpful in preparing this section of the study guide:

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- Earnhart, Paul, *Instrumental Music*, Spoken at Church of Christ in Douglass Hills, KY, November 20, 1994, <http://www.wordsfitlyspoken.org/audio/earnhart/1046A - Instrumental Music.mp3>.

## 6. Modern Miracles and Revelation

### Modern Apostles

Several denominations teach that they uniquely possess modern apostles according to the New Testament pattern. Some believe in apostolic succession, which is that they can trace their supposedly handed-down office all the way back to the original 12 apostles, who were appointed by Jesus. Others believe that they have been divinely and miraculously called to this work. The following questions are designed to focus our attention on the New Testament pattern and compare it to the so-called modern apostles.

1. “Do you believe we should follow the New Testament pattern for the church? Can we omit following **any** part of the pattern for the NT church? Our church has apostles, just like the New Testament church. Who are your church’s apostles?”
2. “The New Testament apostles were replaced as they died. For example, lots were cast to select Matthias to replace Judas (**Acts 1:23-26**). If some preserved the apostolic lineage in this way, why should we not look to them? Or, if the chain of succession was indeed broken, why can we not restore it using the New Testament pattern of **Acts 1:23-26**?”
3. “If Matthias was supposed to be the last of the 12 apostles, then how did Paul become an apostle **after** Matthias (**II Corinthians 1:1; 11:5**)?”
4. “Were not James, “*the Lord’s brother*”, and Barnabas **also** called apostles by inspiration (**Galatians 1:19; Acts 14:14**)? Doesn’t that make for a total of at least **16** apostles according to the Bible?”

### Modern Inspiration, Revelation, & Holy Spirit Leading

Many, many people who today wear the name of Christ believe that the Holy Spirit is directly, miraculously operating on them and in their lives in various ways. People’s beliefs fall along a broad spectrum. Some listen to what the Spirit has “laid on their heart” in decisions to become a preacher, move to another city, pick a different parking place, etc. They look for subtle but divine Spirit nudging in

all aspects of life, even the seemingly mundane. Others believe the Holy Spirit helps them to understand the Bible. In fact, they believe the Bible cannot be understood correctly apart from the Spirit's "glasses". Whereas, others see themselves as Holy Spirit inspired apostles, prophets, and mouthpieces for God, who are no less authoritative than Jesus' original apostles and prophets.

In the first section of this class, we discussed the all sufficiency of Scripture and its permanency, which leaves little wiggle room for those who desire more. The following questions illustrate the responses you may receive in pointing to the Holy Spirit's inspiration of Scripture and its sufficiency (**II Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 3:3-5; II Peter 1:3; Galatians 1:6-8; Jude 3; I Peter 1:23-25; John 12:48**).

5. "What do you mean the Holy Spirit is *not* guiding *me*? Did not Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who would guide us into all truth, help us remember truth, help us understand truth, and help us bear witness of Jesus (**John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15**)?"
  
6. "So, you have *never* felt bad when you did wrong? You have *never* felt an internal pressure to do right?"
  
7. "Just the other day, I had a strange feeling that I should go straight through a green stop-light, so I could go home through the back entrance of my subdivision. I don't know why, because I always slow down and turn left at that light. And then, just after I cleared the light, a huge SUV ran the red light from the other way! If I turned left, like I always do, I would be dead now! The Holy Spirit saved me. There is no way you can make me doubt the Spirit!"
  
8. "Believe me! When the Holy Spirit speaks to you, you will know! The heavens will open; you will see the brightest light – brighter and purer than you can imagine; you will hear God's voice through the Spirit, like a mighty rushing wind thundering through you; you will feel as if you can touch His face; you will feel His warm embrace; you will sense Him throughout your body. When it happens to you, you will no longer doubt!"

## **Modern Tongue-Speaking, Healing, and Other Miracles**

Many denominations would consider themselves "Pentecostal", in that they look to the miraculous events on Pentecost as a pattern for modern worship. They believe that the gifts observed there in **Acts 2** are extended to all true believers. Most of these believe in modern tongue-speaking and Holy Spirit baptism for all, and many believe that all those who ask in faith can receive divine healing for themselves or loved ones. Even snake handling and drinking of "poisons" are undertaken by some.

9. “You ask for proof of my power! Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, who sought to test Him, saying, ‘*Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation*’ (**Mark 8:11-12**). Elsewhere, He said that only “*an **evil and adulterous** generation seeks after a sign*” (**Matthew 12:39**)!”
  
10. “You want proof of my miraculous gifts? The proof you seek is right there in your Bible. Mark describes the signs that would follow those who believe (**Mark 16:17-18**). You hold the proof right in your own hand! ” (Said while pointing to your Bible in your hand.)
  
11. “Jesus said that we would be able to pray for the Holy Spirit and God would give it to us (**Luke 11:13**), and Peter confirmed the same promise on Pentecost (**Acts 2:38-39**). Why would miraculous gifts not be available today to believers, who ask sincerely and believe?”
  
12. “Paul said Timothy was given the gift of “*prophecy **with the laying on of the hands of the eldership***” (**I Timothy 4:14**). Why would any **truly** qualified eldership **not** have the same power today?”
  
13. “God only answers prayers of those who **truly** believe without any doubting (**James 1:6-7**). Even Jesus could not heal some people because of their unbelief (**Matthew 13:57-58**)! Therefore, if you do not enjoy these miraculous blessings, it is merely because you do not truly believe. Your faith is lacking!”
  
14. “The rules and regulations of **I Corinthians 14:23-35** were limited to special assemblies, which were dedicated to prophetic revelation through speaking in tongues, translation, etc. (see verse 23). It has no bearing on the impromptu ecstatic utterances occurring in regular worship.”

15. “**I Corinthians 13:8-13** is not dealing with the cessation of gifts. Its primary point is about love, not condemning others. Yes, verses 8 and 10 **may** indicate that spiritual gifts will cease, when the “*perfect has come*”, but that refers to Jesus’s return, because only He is truly perfect!”

## Holy Spirit Baptism

Many charismatic and Pentecostal groups look to “Holy Spirit Baptism” as exemplified in **Acts 2:1-4** and **10:44-45**, as essential for salvation. Some teach that the Spirit is in the water, when you are water baptized based on **John 3:5**, **I John 5:8**, and similar. Others believe you are baptized in the Spirit and fire at some point after salvation as proof and comfort of your salvation, if not for salvation itself.

16. “Paul said that Holy Spirit baptism is **the** way into the church (**I Corinthians 12:13**). So, if you have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit, you are not saved!”
17. “John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize us into the Holy Spirit and fire (**Luke 3:16**). Why are you trying to turn John into a false prophet?”

## References

The following have been very helpful over the years and in preparing this section of the study guide:

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# 7. Introduction to Cults

## Definition

What is a “cult”? The [online Merriam-Webster](#) dictionary defines “cult” as:

1. : formal religious veneration : worship
2. : a system of religious beliefs and ritual; *also* : its body of adherents
3. : a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious; *also* : its body of adherents
4. : a system for the cure of disease based on dogma set forth by its promulgator <health *cults*>
5.
  - a. : great devotion to a person, idea, object, movement, or work (as a film or book); especially : such devotion regarded as a literary or intellectual fad
  - b. : the object of such devotion
  - c. : a usually small group of people characterized by such devotion

Based on the first and second definitions, virtually every religious group could be considered a “cult”, which is not very helpful. Although this definition points to the older connotation of the word, modern religious usage of “cult” is almost entirely negative, derogatory, and pejorative. Most people would consider it insulting or offensive to be associated with a “cult”. The above third definition, as well as the [online Oxford dictionary](#), suggests this derogatory usage:

- a relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices **regarded by others as strange or sinister**:  
*a network of Satan-worshipping cults*

The [online American Heritage dictionary](#) goes farther, offering this as the primary definition with identifying markers:

1.
  - a. A religion or religious sect **generally considered to be extremist or false**, with its followers often living in an **unconventional manner** under the guidance of an **authoritarian, charismatic leader**.
  - b. The followers of such a religion or sect.

## Traditional and Modern Application

Traditionally, although the label, “cult”, has been applied to destructive, extreme groups (such as, Jim Jones and his Jonestown group, or David Kuresh and his Waco, Texas group), it has also been applied to larger groups that call themselves “Christians” but deviate radically from mainstream beliefs, such as:

- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Seventh Day Adventists
- Christian Scientists
- Church of Scientology
- International Church of Christ (The “Boston church” or “Crossroads” movement)

Insinuating that anyone is a member of a cult will likely cause them to bristle and become very defensive. Furthermore, definitions vary broadly, and part of the definition is recognition of the cult's beliefs as strange. This makes "proper" usage of the word very subjective, as well as derogatory, since virtually everyone's beliefs are strange to someone. Moreover, the key issue for determining the truthfulness of a belief is **not** whether some man regards it as strange. This is a distracting concept that takes away from point of resolution, which is the standard of truth.

## Identifying Marks

Traditional cults as well as clearly destructive cults tend to exhibit the following objective traits:

- **Authoritarian Leader** – A central leader or board of leaders exercises excessive present-day control over all the members, and this leader cannot be challenged successfully without leaving the cult.
- **Charismatic Leader** – The central authority claims miraculous, divine, or inspired insight. This latter day revelation enhances the leader's authority and defines the cult's rites. Lower ranking leaders may also claim some form of unquestionable, inspired leadership, but their opinions are secondary to the opinions of higher ranking leaders. Often extra-Biblical creeds and modified "Bibles" are promulgated to broaden the leadership's influence.
- **Thought Control** – Various forms of psychological pressure, communal isolation, and information control are used to limit independent thought, fair analysis, and alternative selection.
- **Deception and Secrecy** – In cults, not all rites and teaching is available to the outside world. As one is initiated and moves up the hierarchical rank, increased access is granted to more practices, philosophy, and agenda of the cult. Often lies are used to mask less palatable teachings until one becomes more acclimated to the cult.

The more a cult transfers the individual's independent thought and control to a centralized human leadership, the more dangerous and inevitably destructive the cult becomes to its members. Not all cults require the same level of control, although all are ultimately, equally destructive.

## Motivation and Approach

Given the arguable accuracy and emotional baggage associated with labeling someone as a member of a cult, there seems little value in publicly condemning specific groups as "cults". Such labels indicate forgone conclusions, not arguments beyond psychological intimidation themselves. The true issues is not whether a group's beliefs are strange to us, rather the issue is whether a practice is strange to God!

However, there is a critical need in recognizing that an individual is exhibiting a cultic psychology. Unless the authority of a cult's leader is undermined, their leader's inspiration debunked, their minds opened to outside information, and their intellectual honesty restored, there is little hope for any other effort to affect them. Understanding this will focus our efforts and enable us to more effectively "*lay the axe to the root*" (**Ecclesiastes 10:10; Luke 3:9**).

The remaining sections of this class are devoted toward debunking various groups that have been traditionally labeled as "cults" and that exhibit some measure of the above traits.

## References

The substance of much of this material for this section can be found in several works. The following have been very helpful in preparing this section of the study guide:

- Adams, Wilson, *Fast Facts About False Teachings*, Tops Printing, Bryan, Texas, 2010.
- Beyer, Catherine, *What Is a Cult? (Competing Definitions of the Word "Cult")*, <http://altreligion.about.com/od/controversymisconception/a/cult.htm> , March 15, 2013.
- Beyer, Catherine, *What is a Dangerous Cult? (Evaluating Religions as Dangerous Cults)*, [http://altreligion.about.com/od/controversymisconception/a/dangerous\\_cult.htm](http://altreligion.about.com/od/controversymisconception/a/dangerous_cult.htm), March 15, 2013.
- Harkrider, Robert, *Basic Bible Doctrine*, Book 4, Impressive Image Production, Russellville, Alabama, 1987.



## 8. Mormonism

By Greg Steele

The aggressive evangelistic efforts of Mormons have not been without success and will likely lead to encounters with them and those they are trying to proselytize. Consider the following statistics (according to LDS published information):

- Currently over 14.4 Million members (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/>)
- Over 55,000 full-time missionaries (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/>)
- Over \$40 billion in assets (<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-07-10/how-the-mormons-make-money#p2>)
- Mormon Church annual income of more than \$8 billion from tithing alone, would put it well up in the Fortune500™ (<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-07-10/how-the-mormons-make-money#p2/>)

Mormons are generally well respected for their clean, honest living and strong work ethic. They often point to this as proof that their teachings are true and may quote **Matthew 7:16** to bolster their argument saying, “You will know them by their fruits.’ And clearly the fruits of the LDS are good and true.” Many non-Mormons have begun to consider them to be just another “Christian” denomination.

- It is important to understand that just as many denominations are changing their beliefs, so Mormonism has proven to be fluid regarding doctrinal positions. The last 20 years or so has seen an effort by some Mormon leaders and teachers to shift the emphasis of their public teachings regarding God, Jesus and salvation more toward that of the mainline denominations. Much of the growth being experienced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is in the form of converts from protestant denominations. The idea seems to be, “the more palatable our introductory teachings to these prospects, the more likely they will be converted.”
- There is, however, a set of doctrines to which most who have been Mormons for very long will cling. Although they may not have a full understanding of these teachings and their implications, they will likely have a decent working knowledge of them.

This material will center on gaining an understanding of a few of the fundamental teachings of Mormonism, which proof texts they use and what the Bible actually teaches regarding Mormon doctrine.

### Mormon View of God

The Mormon view of God is one of the more radical departures from the Truth revealed in God's word. Most Mormons hold the following basic belief's regarding God:

- He is not the only God. In fact there are many Gods.
- God has a physical body.
- He was once a man, but has progressed to Godhood.
- He did not create the universe from nothing, but rather from eternally existent matter.

## Plurality of Gods

### **Position Documented**

*“If we should take a million worlds like this and number their particles, we should find that there are more gods than particles of matter in those worlds.” --Orson Pratt (Apostle), Journal of Discourses, Vol.2, p.345*

### **Proof Texts**

- **Psalms 82** – The use of Elohim, translated gods in this passage, is taken to be proof that there are in fact other gods. Jesus' application of this passage (**John 10:34**) to those whom He is addressing then means that men can become gods as well.
- **Genesis 11:7** – Use of the plural 'Us' is understood by Mormons to be proof of multiple Gods.
- **Matthew 3:16-17** – Since all three of members of the Godhead are present in different capacities, Mormons use this passage to show that there are actually three distinct Gods.
- **I Corinthians 8:5** – Since this passage states, “there are many gods” Mormons conclude this proves their doctrine to be true.

### **Questions**

1. A young Mormon missionary reads **Psalms 82** to you and then declares, "See, the Bible teaches that there is more than one God. Why do you not believe what the Bible clearly teaches?" How would you respond?
2. “If there is only one God, then why does **Genesis 11:7** say ‘let **Us** go down...?’” Isn’t this enough proof for you that there is more than one God?” What would you say to this argument?
3. “**Matthew 3:16-17** makes no sense if there is only one God. Since Jesus is a God and he is clearly in a body on the earth, Heavenly Father is a God who is speaking from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit is a God and is floating down like a bird. This passage shows three Gods.” How would you correct this interpretation?
4. “There is no clearer passage than **I Corinthians 8:5**. It says clearly, ‘*there are many Gods.*’” Is this passage really teaching plurality of Gods?

## God Has a Physical Body

### **Position Documented**

*“That there is a God in heaven who is infinite and eternal; who has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s, and who is in fact a resurrected, glorified, perfected and exalted Man...” -- Bruce McConkie (Apostle), The Mortal Messiah, p.21*

### **Proof Texts**

- **Genesis 1:26-27** - *“Let Us make man in Our image,...”* Mormons take this to mean that God made man physically in his own image.
- **Genesis 32:30** - Mormons argue that God is here wrestling physically with Jacob and that clearly shows He has a physical body.
- **Exodus 24:10-11** - Here the *“feet”* of verse 10 and the *“hand”* of verse 11 are taken to be literal physical body parts of God.
- **Exodus 33:11** – See above discussion of **Exodus 24:10-11**.
- **Acts 7:55-56** - Mormons assert that since Stephen looked up into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, He must have other body parts as well and therefore a fleshly body.
- **Hebrews 1:3** - Again, Mormons see the reference to the hand of God in this passage as evidence that He has a physical body.

### **Questions**

5. “Since **Genesis 1:26-27** shows our bodies were made to look like God’s body, we know that He has a body like ours.” How would you respond?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. “Here in **Genesis 32:30** we see God wrestling with Jacob. Jacob’s leg was even hurt as a result. Surely you don’t believe that this is some kind of spiritual or metaphorical wrestling, do you? So you see, God must have a physical body like ours.” What would you say to this argument?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. “In these numerous examples from **Exodus, Acts** and **Hebrews**, the point is made over and over again – God has a body with parts just like we do. Can you deny so many passages that teach this?” Give your answer.

## God Was Once a Man

### **Position Documented**

*“It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another and that He was once a man like us; yea that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did...” Joseph Smith, Jr., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345*

### **Questions**

8. I know of no passage from the Bible that Mormons use to support this teaching, but can you find any passages that refute it?

## God Utilized Pre-existent Matter to Create the Earth

### **Position Documented**

*“God, the supreme Power, cannot conceivably originate matter; he can only organize matter. Neither can he destroy matter; he can only disorganize it...The doctrine that God made the earth or man from nothing becomes, therefore, an absurdity.” --Apostle John Widstoe, A Rational Theology, p.12*

### **Proof Texts**

- **Genesis 1:1-2** – Use of the Hebrew word 'bara' is taken by Mormons to mean only that God organized matter (see the above quote).

### **Questions**

9. Research this Hebrew word 'bara' and determine if the Mormon interpretation is the only reasonable explanation.

10. What other passages can you find that refute the Mormon position?

## Ancient Apostasy and Need for Restoration

Mormons teach that an apostasy immediately followed the death of the Apostles, was complete and not only resulted in the corruption of the Bible, but the complete eradication of the true Church:

- The apostasy began immediately after the apostles died and proceeded so quickly that the true Church was no longer in existence by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.
- The Bible was purposefully changed to erase previous truths regarding the nature of God, the Church, salvation, heaven and other important truths.
- The apostasy necessitated “The Restoration” by Joseph Smith.

## Immediate Apostasy

### **Position Documented**

*With the passing of the Apostles and the loss of the priesthood keys, corrupt doctrines were introduced into the Church...By the second and third centuries, widespread changes had been made in the pure doctrines and ordinances given by the Savior. The Church that Jesus had established and sanctioned was no longer on this earth” -- Ezra Taft Benson (Prophet), Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.86*

### **Proof Texts**

- **Deuteronomy 4:28** – For the meaning of this verse Mormons would have us look past the idolatry of Israel to the graven images of the Catholic church in particular and to a lesser extent the Protestant churches. One reason for this is that fact that the gods that are in view here could “neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.” Mormons also see a fulfillment of this passage in the fact that other churches deny that God has a physical body the same as man's, resulting in them proclaiming a God who cannot see, hear, eat or smell.
- **Acts 20:29-30** – Paul warns the Ephesian elders that false teachers would arise from among them and have success deceiving some of the brethren. Mormons use this verse to teach that the entire church would go into complete apostasy and would require the restoration of the church by Joseph Smith, Jr.
- **Galatians 1:8** – Perhaps in an effort to “beat you to the punch”, Mormons sometimes use this passage to teach that the apostasy ultimately resulted in “another gospel” accepted by all believers by around the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.
- **II Thessalonians 2:3** – Here the expression, “the falling away” is taken to indicate the complete disappearance of the true church.
- **I Timothy 4:1-2** – Mormons would have us believe that this verse indicates that all would fall away from the true faith.

### **Questions**

11. “**Deuteronomy 4:28** prophesied that because the churches of Christendom would setup a god ‘*which neither sees no hears nor smells*’ the true God would forsake them and allow them to go away into complete apostasy. So, you see it is crucial that we understand that God has a physical body just as we do.” How would you correct this misunderstanding?

12. “We can know from **Acts 20:29-30** that the flock, that is, the Church, would not be spared, but would be completely decimated. It would start with the Church leaders and continue until all of the disciples had been ‘*drawn away*.’ That is why it was necessary for God to use His faithful prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. to restore the Gospel and the Church in its purity.” What is wrong with the Momon’s argument and how would you deal with it?
  
13. “As shown here in **Galatians 1**, before the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, disciples were falling away and believing ‘*another gospel*.’ Within a few hundred years, the apostasy was complete and the true Church had disappeared from the face of the earth.” How would you respond?
  
14. According to **II Thessalonians 2:1-4**, Christ’s return could not happen before there had been a complete ‘*falling away*’ had occurred. Notice how complete the apostasy would be – everything associated with true worship would be perverted. The true Church would cease to exist.” What answer would you give?
  
15. In a clear description of the Catholic Church’s perversions (the Book of Mormon refers to it as ‘The great abominable church’ after all), **I Timothy 4:1-3** details the disappearance of the true Church, thus requiring a complete restoration.” How would you deal with this reasoning?

### **Apostasy's Effect on the Bible**

In the LDS Articles of Faith we find that Mormons believe “the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” While on the surface this seems reasonable, this is not actually what most Mormons believe regarding the veracity of the Bible. The Book of Mormon states their stand more correctly, “*Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book...*” I Nephi 13:28

### **Position Documented**

- “Satan guided his servant in taking many plain and precious things, and many covenants of the Lord from the Bible, so that men would stumble and fall and lose their souls.” Bruce McConkie (Apostle), *The Millennial Messiah*, p. 160-161
- “Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of translation, and who, in his right mind, could for one moment suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide. Who know that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original. Orson Pratt (Apostle), *The Bible and Insufficient Guide*, p.47

### **Questions**

16. What facts would you use to help a Mormon understand that the Bible is absolutely reliable?

## **Apostasy Required “The Restoration” by Joseph Smith**

### **Position documented**

- “Nothing less than the complete apostasy from the Christian religion would warrant the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” B.H. Roberts (Seventy), *History of the Church 1:XL*
- “Therefore, in order that there might be a “restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (see Acts 3:21), it was necessary that these two priesthoods be restored again to men upon this earth.” LeGrand Richards (Apostle), *A Marvelous Work And A Wonder*, p. 82

### **Proof Texts**

- **Acts 3:20-21** – As shown in the quote above, Mormons believe that the Melchizedek and Aaronic priesthoods are in view here and that this passage is pointing to these priesthoods being restored to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1830.
- **Revelation 14:6** – The angel in this passage is understood by Mormons to be Moroni restoring “the everlasting gospel” to Joseph Smith, since they believe it had been lost during the apostasy.

### **Questions**

17. “Here in **Acts 3**, we see that there would come a day after the apostasy, that a ‘refreshing’ or ‘restoration’ would come directly from the presence of God. This is exactly what happened when God sent the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith Jr. to restore the true Church.” In what way would you respond to this argument?

18. “What a clear passage we have here in **Revelation 14!** In verse 6, we see the prophecy that an angel would bring the ‘*everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth.*’ In the Book of Mormon, we learn the identity of this angel. It is Moroni, who brought the pure gospel to Joseph Smith Jr.” How would you respond?

## **Inconsistencies in the Mormon Version of the Apostasy**

### ***John and the Three Nephites***

*“I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me. Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death;” III Nephi 28:6-7*

Per the verses above and the Doctrine and Covenants section 7, Mormons maintain that John and three Nephite men never died and remain on the earth until this day. What have they been doing?

*“And these men that have never tasted death – the three Nephites and the Apostle John -are busy working to bring to pass righteousness and carry out the purposes of God.” Franklin Dewey Richard (Apostle), Collected Discourses, vol.3*

So how could there have been a complete apostasy if these four men have been faithfully attending to the work of the Lord and bringing to pass righteousness?

### ***Mormon Apostle Succession***

Mormons have always maintained that the LDS Church is identical to the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. One characteristic of the LDS Church is their attentiveness to promptly replacing Apostles as they die. If this was the practice of the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, why did the Apostles disappear immediately after the death of John and result in the complete falling away of the church as they assert?

## **Conclusion**

There are many more topics regarding Mormonism that could be discussed. Many of the points from the sections on the Holy Spirit and the succession of Apostles would be useful in a study with Mormons as well. It would also be good to familiarize yourself with Mormon teaching regarding salvation (the Three Kingdoms of Heaven in particular), before engaging in a study.

## **Reference**

The following was very helpful in preparing this section of the study guide:

- Barnett, Maurice, *Mormonism Against Itself*, Copyright 1980. Maurice Barnett Printing Service, Cullman, Alabama (available for free in various ebook formats at: <http://archive.org/details/MormonismAgainstItself>)



# Appendices

## Guide To Inductive & Deductive Reasoning – Induction vs. Deduction

October, 2008, by The Critical Thinking Co.™ Staff

<http://www.criticalthinking.com/company/articles/inductive-deductive-reasoning.jsp>

Induction and deduction are pervasive elements in critical thinking. They are also somewhat misunderstood terms. Arguments based on experience or observation are best expressed inductively, while arguments based on laws or rules are best expressed deductively. Most arguments are mainly inductive. In fact, inductive reasoning usually comes much more naturally to us than deductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning moves from specific details and observations (typically of nature) to the more general underlying principles or process that explains them (e.g., Newton's Law of Gravity). It is open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning. The premises of an inductive argument are believed to support the conclusion, but do not ensure it. Thus, the conclusion of an induction is regarded as a hypothesis. In the Inductive method, also called the scientific method, observation of nature is the authority.

In contrast, deductive reasoning typically moves from general truths to specific conclusions. It opens with an expansive explanation (statements known or believed to be true) and continues with predictions for specific observations supporting it. Deductive reasoning is narrow in nature and is concerned with testing or confirming a hypothesis. It is dependent on its premises. For example, a false premise can lead to a false result, and inconclusive premises will also yield an inconclusive conclusion. Deductive reasoning leads to a confirmation (or not) of our original theories. It guarantees the correctness of a conclusion. Logic is the authority in the deductive method.

If you can strengthen your argument or hypothesis by adding another piece of information, you are using inductive reasoning. If you cannot improve your argument by adding more evidence, you are employing deductive reasoning.

# The Blind Men and the Elephant

The poems of John Godfrey Saxe (1872)

by John Godfrey Saxe

A HINDOO FABLE.

IT was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side,  
At once began to bawl:  
"God bless me! — but the Elephant  
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,  
Cried: "Ho! — what have we here  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me 't is mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,  
Thus boldly up and spake:  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out his eager hand,  
And felt about the knee.  
"What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain," quoth he;  
"'T is clear enough the Elephant  
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,  
Said: "E'en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most;  
Deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an Elephant  
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun  
About the beast to grope,  
Than, seizing on the swinging tail  
That fell within his scope,  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong!

MORAL:

So, oft in theologic wars  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean,  
And prate about an Elephant  
Not one of them has seen!

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_poems\\_of\\_John\\_Godfrey\\_Saxe/The\\_Blind\\_Men\\_and\\_the\\_Elephant](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_poems_of_John_Godfrey_Saxe/The_Blind_Men_and_the_Elephant)