

Basics of Bible and Salvation:

Fundamentals in 4 Lessons

- Overview and Theme of the Bible
- The Testaments
- God's Plan for Mankind's Salvation
- Simply Christians

Overview and Theme of the Bible

Lesson 1 of 4

Overview of the Bible

The word “Bible” means “Book.” The Bible is a collection of 66 books. At least 40 men took part in the writing of it over a period of about 1600 years. The Old Testament was written mainly in the Hebrew language, with parts of Daniel and Ezra in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in the common Greek language of the time. By the first century A.D. when Christ lived, the Old Testament had already been compiled, and the same books that are accepted as our Old Testament today were accepted then as Scripture. The New Testament was being written and compiled during the first century.

The Bible is a remarkable Book. From a human standpoint, there is much to be amazed at in the writing and compilation of the Bible. But there is another factor involved. The Bible claims to be the word of God, not just a collection of books written by men. The Bible did not originate with man at all. In fact, God used men by inspiring them through His Holy Spirit to write the things that He wanted us to know (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16). God is the author of the Bible, and it was by His oversight and direction that we now have the collection of 66 books that make up the Bible. There is much evidence available to us that should convince us that the Bible is the word of God and that it is trustworthy. The harmony of Scripture, prophecy, and its survival are but a few irrefutable evidences that the Bible is really what it claims to be: the word of God.

The Bible is the complete revelation of God. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and making one complete for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The Bible is the objective standard by which we will be judged (John 12:48). Therefore, all of our appeals must be from the Bible, for this is the only way that we can know that we are pleasing to God; and it is the only way that we can have the unity that God desires (1 Corinthians 1:10–13; Ephesians 4:1–6). We must not think beyond the Scriptures, nor transgress the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9; 1 Corinthians 4:6). Everything that we teach, believe,

and practice must be found in God's inspired word. This is the first major premise upon which we will build all of our lessons in this series. Otherwise, we will be groping in man's insufficiencies (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23).

Theme of the Bible

Even though the Bible is made up of 66 books, it is not a disjointed collection of myths and fables. It is true and accurate. Furthermore, it has a flow to it, a beginning and an end, and it all fits together as one whole story. For instance, the book of Exodus picks right up where Genesis left off, Leviticus picks up where Exodus left off, and Numbers goes from there. Likewise, the New Testament books pick up and carry the same theme that the Old Testament does. In fact, one cannot fully grasp the New Testament without some understanding of the Old. This just points out the fact that the Bible is complete and whole, and needs to be taken as a unit. We cannot pick and choose which books we like best and disregard the rest. They are all vitally important to our understanding of the will of God.

The Bible has a purpose. It is communication from God to man, and God has something very important to say to us. "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." (Hebrews 1:1, 2). This points to our great need to listen to the word of God so that we can gain the faith we need to be saved (Romans 10:17). The Bible has a main theme throughout its pages both in the Old and New Testaments. That theme is God's glory and His plan for mankind's salvation.

The book of Genesis opens with the creation of the world. The first two chapters go into detail of the creation, with chapter two focusing in on man. At that time, Adam and Eve lived in the garden of Eden, which was literally paradise on earth. There was no corruption, no death, and no evil. However, chapter three marks a sad day for mankind. Adam and Eve sinned, which resulted in spiritual death, separation from God and from the garden. It also resulted in physical death, which was to come to them a few years later. God has revealed that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Adam and Eve were the first sinners, and since then no one (except Jesus Christ) has succeeded in living without sin (Romans 3:23; 5:12). This is not because sin is inherited from generation to generation, but because man has since then always made the choice to rebel against God.

It is not God's will that any should perish in their sins (2 Peter 3:9). From Genesis three on through the rest of the Bible, God reveals His plan to save mankind from their sins. This plan is centered on One who would come down from heaven, live a sinless life, and die for the sins of the world, tasting death for every man in order to pay the price for sin (Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He is known as Jesus Christ, and He is the central theme in both the Old and New Testaments. Even in Genesis three, God gives a glimpse of hope to those in sin (3:15). Then

He promises to Abraham that from his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). He was speaking of Jesus (Acts 3:25–26). The Old Testament then follows the descendants of Abraham through whom the Christ would come. These descendants became known as the children of Israel, the Hebrews, or (later) the Jews. God took these people, set them apart, and gave them a Law that they were to follow. This Law is known as the “Law of Moses,” and it began with the Ten Commandments as first given in Exodus 20. During the years that the children of Israel lived in the land of Canaan, they were to be looking for the Christ who would deliver them from sin. The prophets (books of Isaiah through Malachi) prophesied often of the Christ. Unfortunately, the children of Israel ultimately rebelled against God and they lost their land and power as a nation. Yet, God kept His promise and sent the Savior into the world. This is where the New Testament begins. The first four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, give us biographical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. They show conclusively that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament promises and prophecies. He indeed is the Savior of the world, and by His life and death, offers salvation to everyone who will believe and obey His word (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 5:9).

The book of Acts gives the history and growth of the early church of Christ. Jesus had promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), and Acts 2 gives the account of its establishment. The word “church,” as applied to the Lord’s church, refers to God’s people who have come out of sin and darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear son (2 Thessalonians 2:14; Colossians 1:13). The rest of the New Testament (Romans through Revelation) are epistles (letters) written to churches and individual Christians instructing them further in the way of God.

Can I Be Saved?

Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself on a cross in order to die for the sins of the world. This includes all of us; and God our Savior “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). You can be saved from your sins and enjoy the promised hope of eternal life in heaven (1 John 2:25; Titus 1:2). In order for you to be saved from sins and have this hope, you must comply with the conditions that God has set down in His word. Remember, the only way that we know that we are right is if we follow exactly what God says. The only way that we can know that we are saved is by looking to His word. “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). We cannot know we are saved based on our own feelings, but only by God’s word. How? We find out what God says, do that, and we have the promise of eternal life. It’s that simple. The problem is that there are too many who don’t want to do what God says. As a result, there are many who will be lost, even though they thought they were saved (Matthew 7:21–23; Luke 6:46). Jesus taught that the way to heaven is narrow and there are few who find it, but the way to hell is wide, and there are many who find it (Matthew 7:13, 14). If you want to be among the few who find

the narrow way, then you must obey all that God says to do.

“What Must I Do?”

This is the question the Jews asked Peter in Acts 2:37. They were convicted of their sin and wanted to know how to be saved. Briefly, here is what God commands us to do to be saved:

1. Upon hearing the word of God, we must believe the gospel (Romans 1:16; 10:17). Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).
2. We must repent of and turn from our sins (Acts 17:30, 31). We cannot continue living in our sins if we want to go to heaven (Romans 6:1, 2).
3. We must confess Jesus Christ as Lord with our mouths (Romans 10:9, 10).
4. We must be buried in water (baptized) for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3, 4). When we do this, we crucify ourselves, bury the old man, put on Christ, and rise to walk in newness of life (Galatians 5:24; 3:27).

After we have done what God says in order to be saved, we must then continue to abide in His word (John 8:31). We must be faithful unto death in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Only through Him can we be saved (Acts 4:12). You must be convinced of this and act accordingly.

Doy Moyer

The Testaments

Lesson 2 of 4

The Bible is divided into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” refers to a covenant that God made. It is His ‘will’ in which He has laid down His law for people to follow. Since the Bible is divided into these two sections, it is important for us to understand something about them.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is composed of 39 books beginning with Genesis and ending with Malachi. Genesis is the history of the origin of man, of sin entering the world, and God putting His plan for salvation into effect. Genesis tells of

Abraham and the promises that God made to him. There were three main promises given in Genesis 12:1–3: 1) Land, 2) Nation, and 3) Seed. God promised that He would make a great nation from the descendants of Abraham. This would be fulfilled through his son Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had twelve sons. From these a great nation arose which became known as the children of Israel. It would be these people who were to be God's chosen nation. God also promised them land. This promise was fulfilled when God brought them out of Egyptian bondage into the land of Canaan, which later was known as Palestine. The third promise was the seed promise. God had promised to send a Savior through Abraham's seed (offspring), through which all nations would be blessed. This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25–26).

The book of Exodus tells how Moses was raised up by God to deliver the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. They had, years before, gone down to Egypt to live and became a large nation; and Egypt turned them into slaves. God determined to bring them out of Egypt with a mighty hand to bring this chosen nation into their own land. God made a covenant with these people and they accepted the terms (Exodus 19, 20). The Ten Commandments were recorded on tablets of stone, and God gave many additional instructions which were a part of what came to be known as the Law of Moses. These instructions are recorded in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. The rest of the Old Testament tells the history of the people. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not live up to the terms of the covenant and they were expelled from the land and taken into captivity. The books known as the Prophets are records of the many warnings, saying that God would judge them if they did not turn from their sin. It was important that the Israelites remain a distinct nation. God was bringing about His promise to send the Savior into the world through them. Thus God spared a remnant of the people and fulfilled His promise when Jesus Christ was born.

The New Testament

The New Testament begins with the four accounts of Christ's life on earth. They were written to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah (anointed one). They show that Jesus was "God manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:1, 14). They tell of the life He lived and of His cruel death on a Roman cross. This was necessary that mankind might be saved from their sins (Hebrews 2:9).

When Christ died on the cross, He ushered in the New Covenant. Christ Himself lived under the Law of Moses (Galatians 4:4). However, He also came in order to fulfill the Old Law (Matthew 5:17). God had promised through Jeremiah the prophet that He would establish a new covenant unlike the old (Jeremiah 31:31–34). This is fulfilled in the books that we call the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6–13). The Law of Moses was a law for the children of Israel, but this new law would be for all nations (Isaiah 2:1–4). When Christ died on the cross, the Law of Moses was also nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14). Thus, the

Law of Moses is no longer in effect, and the people were rebuked when they tried to go back under that law (Galatians 5:1-4). This does not mean it is of no use for us today. It is for our learning and example (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11). However, we are not bound by the conditions of the Old Law.

When Christ died and took the old law out of the way, He opened up a new and living way for us to approach God (Hebrews 10:19-22). The Law of Moses, which served as a barrier between the Jew and Gentile, was broken down so that Jew and Gentile could be one in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-16). The problem was that the Law of Moses was not adequate to take away the sins of the people. The sacrifices did not satisfy the requirements for forgiveness (Hebrews 10:1-4). When Christ came, He satisfied the requirements and forgiveness is available through Him (Hebrews 10:5-10). This is what the new covenant is all about.

Christ promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). It was prophesied that He would establish His Kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Christ fulfilled this when He was raised from the dead and sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to work through His apostles (Acts 2). "Church" refers to the group of people who had accepted the terms of the covenant and were saved (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). These are the people who submitted themselves to the rule of Christ to become a part of His Kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Those who do the same today are also His church, His kingdom.

The book of Acts is a history of the early church, showing how it grew and multiplied, both during times of peace and persecution. The rest of the books of the New Testament are written to churches and individuals, revealing further the will of God which embraces all people.

All Truth Given

Before Jesus died, He promised His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit would reveal all truth to them: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:12, 13). This was a promise given to His chosen apostles. Either it was fulfilled or it wasn't. If it was fulfilled, then all truth has been given and we need not look for further revelation today. If it was not fulfilled, then what Christ said was false and the New Testament is meaningless.

The apostles affirmed that what Christ said was true. They claimed to receive all truth; and they were in the process of writing it down. The apostle Paul spoke of the mystery, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians

3:5). Peter spoke of the fact that God's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). Jude confirmed this when he wrote exhorting his readers to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3).

Jude wrote that the faith, which is the whole of the gospel, was "once for all delivered." This means that the faith delivered then is of perpetual validity and never needs repetition. This is the meaning of the word translated "once for all." The miracles that were performed were to confirm the message of the gospel, proving that it was from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4). The apostle Paul further wrote that when revelation was completed, then the spiritual gifts, which imparted revelation in partial form, would cease (I Corinthians 13:8-13). Since revelation is complete, then so have the spiritual gifts ceased.

The New Testament was written in the first century and compiled into one volume within the second century. It has been brought down to us through the centuries and is trustworthy today. Hundreds of ancient manuscripts exist which show that what we have today is true and accurate. This is what God Himself had promised, that His words would never pass away, and that His word is incorruptible, living and abiding forever (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23, 25). We have God's promise that His word which was delivered in the first century will always be valid and true. God has seen to it that we can have a faithful reproduction of what was delivered by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

The Gospel is for Obedience

The New Testament reveals God's will for us today. It is the law of Christ that all are bound under (1 Corinthians 9:21). Therefore, we must obey the conditions that God set forth in this covenant. It is a gospel of grace, and there is no way that we can earn our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10). However, grace does not nullify the fact that we must obey God's will. "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9). "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" (Romans 10:16). From this verse we can see that faith and obedience go hand in hand (see also James 2:14-26). Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6); and the kind of faith that pleases God is an obedient faith. When we obey, then we receive the blessings of God's grace. It is only after we have done the will of God that we receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36). It is therefore vital that we study God's word in order to know what He would have us to do. We cannot go to any other source for our faith and practice.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The way that we come to the Father is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Let us search it diligently, making sure that what we believe and practice is the truth (Acts 17:11).

God's Plan for Mankind's Salvation

Lesson 3 of 4

The Bible was written for the purpose of revealing God's plan for mankind's salvation. This is an essential theme of the Bible. The question might arise, though, "salvation from what?" Why do we need to be saved? Exactly how does God bring about this salvation? These are the questions this lesson addresses.

Sin

In a word, the reason why we need salvation is because of sin. What exactly is sin? "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). In other words, we sin when we transgress the law that God has laid down. Sin not only transgresses the law of God, it is a falling short of His glory (Romans 3:23).

When God created Adam and Eve, He put them in the Garden of Eden to live there and tend to it (Genesis 2:15). Then God gave them a restriction: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). God laid down His law and gave the consequences of transgressing it. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did eat of the forbidden tree and sinned (Genesis 3:1-6).

What is so bad about sin? We can see the consequences of sin right from the very first sin. God told them that the day they ate of that tree, they would die. The reason why sin is so terrible is because it causes death. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This is so from two standpoints. First, physical death is the result of sin. Because Adam and Eve sinned, the chain of physical death began, and now all people will die physically. This was not God's original purpose, but sin is the reason for it. It is not God's fault, but man's. Secondly, and even more serious, is that sin causes spiritual death. Death involves separation. When we die physically, the spirit is separated from the body (James 2:26). When we die spiritually, we are separated from God. This is why sin is so terrible and destructive. God wants to have fellowship with His creatures, but sin makes it so that we are separated from God. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). God is a holy God, and He cannot endure sin. Therefore, those who have sinned lose their fellowship with God and are considered to be lost and dead spiritually (see Ezekiel 18:4).

Every person needs to realize that he has sinned against God. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Every accountable person has transgressed God's law and is therefore lost in his sins. This is not so because we inherit the sins of our parents (Ezekiel 18). Nor has God made us so that we have to sin and have no choice. The truth is that every person has made a choice to sin. Every action we take is our own choice, and this is why God holds us accountable for our actions. It is vital to understand this; otherwise we cannot realize our lost condition and come to God for salvation.

Jesus Christ

Up to this point, we have seen that all people have sinned and are lost, separated from God. If they physically die in this state, then they will be lost forever, suffering the eternal consequences of rebelling against God. However, God has not left us without hope, and this is why we have the Bible given to us. There is an answer to the problem of sin. We do not have to continue in sin and be lost forever. God has made available a way to be forgiven. The answer to the sin problem is Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, our sins can be forgiven, and we can regain the fellowship with God that we lost when we first sinned. This is why the "gospel" is literally "good news." God has provided a way to be saved and freed from our sins.

Who is Jesus Christ? Historically, Jesus was a man who lived in Palestine during the first century A.D. However, the Bible tells us that Jesus was much more than a man. He was actually "God manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:15; John 1:1, 14). Because of the sins of mankind, God the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth in order to die for the sins of mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Remember, the wages of sin is death. Jesus became a sacrifice for sin. He tasted death for every man so that we do not have to bear the eternal consequences of sin (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus shed His blood on a Roman cross in order to satisfy the requirement for forgiving our sins (Hebrews 10:5-10). This sacrifice is truly the grace of God, because we did not in any way merit this "gift" from God. God did it because He loves us and wants us to be saved and forgiven. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

Not only did Christ die for our sins, but He was also raised from the dead never to die again (Romans 6:4). This assures us that we too can have victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15). This makes the message of the cross so great. If all Christ did was to die, then it would have been meaningless. However, He is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). This is the basis for the hope of heaven.

Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the

Father except through Me” (John 14:6). The way that we gain our reconciliation with God is through Jesus Christ. However, this salvation that we can have is not unconditional. God is not going to save anybody while they are still in their sins. Sin is what separated us from God in the first place. Now God has done His part in sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins, but He has also laid down conditions that we must meet if we will be saved. Jesus told believers in John 8:31–32, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” If we don’t abide in His word, then we are guilty of transgressing His law; we are guilty of sin. Therefore, we must know the truth and abide within it in order to be true disciples of Jesus. He is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

Salvation

Just what do we need to do in order to be saved from our sins? God has given basic requirements that we must meet in order to be saved.

1. Faith is required. Without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). We must believe that He is, and that He rewards all who diligently seek Him. The kind of faith that God requires is an active and obedient faith. If we believe, we will act upon our faith and do what God commands. The Bible does not teach the popular concept of “faith only.” The Bible does teach that faith must work together with obedience (works) in order for us to be justified and saved (James 2:14–26).

2. Repentance is necessary for salvation. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of action. It is a turning from sin, a resolve to not commit sin anymore. Since sin separates us from God, then we must resolve to put sin behind us and refuse to continue in it. “Repent therefore and turn, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). If we will not repent, then we will die in our sins, lost and separated from God for an eternity in the punishing fires of hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). This does not have to be, if we will turn from our sins and follow Jesus Christ.

3. Confession is also required for salvation. Jesus said that “whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). The apostle Paul wrote that “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation” (Romans 10:9, 10).

4. Baptism is necessary in order to have our sins forgiven. When the Jews on Pentecost realized that they had crucified the Son of God, they were pricked in their hearts and asked, “What must we do?” Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of

sins” (Acts 2:38). Baptism, which is immersion (burial) in water, is the final act of obedience that puts a person into a proper relationship with Christ. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26, 27). Baptism, then, serves to put on Christ. It is the act in which we contact the blood of Christ, making possible a new life in Him. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3, 4). If we refuse to be baptized, then we will not conform to the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We will never be raised to walk in newness of life, which means our sins will not be forgiven. Thus, baptism plays a vital role in our salvation (1 Peter 3:21). This is not so because we just decided that it was necessary. It is so because this is what God has said. Remember, proper faith means taking God at His word and obeying every condition He has laid down. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Of course, baptism is not the end of obedience. It is simply the beginning of a new life. God expects us to be faithful to Him, living according to the standard that He has given in His word (Revelation 2:10; Ephesians 4:1).

Sin has terrible consequences. However, we can be saved from our sins if we will come to Jesus Christ and obey God’s conditions for salvation.

Doy Moyer

Simply Christians

Lesson 4 of 4

The Church of the Lord

Before Jesus Christ died on the cross, He promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). This promise was fulfilled in Acts 2. The gospel was preached, the conditions for salvation were given, and those who obeyed were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:37, 38, 41, 47).

Just what is the church? The word “church” simply refers to an assembly of people. In the case of Christ’s church, people were transferred from sin and darkness into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). Those who are saved are the Lord’s church. They are the people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). This is the body of people whom Christ will save (Ephesians 5:23). It is vital, therefore, that we understand some

things about this church.

First, the Lord built only one church. Ephesians 4:4 tells us, “There is one body.” Earlier, this body is identified as the church: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22–23). Since the body is the church, and there is only one body, then it is true that there is only one church. In other words, there is only one universal body of people who will be saved. Christ did not come to build any denominations. In fact, denominations were unheard of until centuries after Christ’s church was established. Denominationalism is built upon division, and is sinful (1 Corinthians 1:10–13). The Lord did not build many churches based upon many faiths. Rather, He built one church based upon one faith (Ephesians 4:5). Churches built later and founded upon the doctrines of men are wrong, and must be rejected (see Matthew 15:1–9, 13; Psalm 127:1).

The word “church,” as it refers to God’s people, is used in a couple of different senses. It is used in the universal sense, meaning all of the people of God without reference to time and space (place). This refers to all of God’s people at all times, those whose names are “registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). Whether people live in Europe, the United States, or any other country, if they obey the gospel, then they are added to the Lord’s church by the Lord Himself.

The word “church” is also used in a local sense. This refers to God’s people who have banded together in a specific location in order to carry out certain commands that God ordained to take place within a local church organization. For instance, Paul wrote a letter to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2). This was written to a specific group of people who assembled in a specific locality. It is in this sense in which the word “church” can also be used in the plural. Paul wrote, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16). This refers, not to several denominations, but to several local congregations that belonged to God.

The church in a universal sense has no organization. There are no earthly headquarters, no councils, synods, or groups to decide what everyone else is to do. There is no “mother church” to which all other churches are tied. The only organization of the church is found in the local work (see Philippians 1:1). God has ordained that certain things be done as a church, in which Christians come together in order to fulfill a particular command. For example, the disciples met together as a church on the first day of the week in order to break bread, or partake of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18–34). Christians are to assemble with each other on the first day of the week to do this. When several Christians meet and decide to work together, then they become the church of Christ in that specific location. Every person who has obeyed the gospel and been added to the church (universal) by the Lord needs to find a faithful local group of Christians who are following God’s word in order carry out God’s will. Unless this

is done, they will be unable to obey certain commands that are to be done “as a church.”

Simply Christians

Those who obeyed the gospel came to be known as “Christians” (Acts 11:26). They were not identified by man-made names. They did not call themselves after men or after men’s doctrines. In fact, when certain ones tried to call themselves after men, they were rebuked for it (1 Corinthians 1:10–13). All that such can lead to is division, which is strongly condemned by God. We are to be followers of Christ only, simply Christians who are following God’s word in every way. When looking for a group of people with whom to work and worship, make sure that they are not a denomination, that they are not named after a man or a man’s doctrine. Make sure they are simply Christians who are following God’s word.

Names are very important in God’s word. There are several reasons why we are to wear the name of Christ only:

1. It honors Christ who died for us. Why honor man for something that Christ did?
2. We are baptized in the name of Christ and into Christ (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).
3. The Bible condemns wearing human names (1 Corinthians 1:10–13; 3:4–6, 11).
4. We are “married” to Christ (Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:23–30). Would we marry one person while taking another’s name?
5. There is salvation in no other name (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).
6. We are God’s children (Galatians 3:26; I Timothy 3:15). Do children take someone else’s name?
7. As shown, this is the name that the disciples in the first century were called (Acts 11:26). If we wish to be Christians just like those in the first century, who lived under the direction of the apostles of Jesus, then why would we take a name to ourselves that was unknown until centuries later?

Of course, just wearing a name is not enough. In order to be Christians, we must be following God’s word. A true Christian is going to find other true Christians with whom to work.

Back to the Bible

Basics of Bible and Salvation

With so many churches existing today, how can we know who is right and who is wrong? The answer is, “Go back to the Bible.” It is our duty to “test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1), and to “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (2 Thessalonians 5:21). God’s word is the standard, and everyone not living up to that is wrong. Churches that do not follow the pattern for the church as laid down in the Bible are not churches of Christ. It is our duty to search the Scriptures, making sure that what is taught and practiced is the truth (Acts 17:11). If we are deceived, it our own fault.

It is the plea of every Christian, especially in today’s world of so many denominations and doctrines, to go back to the Bible. This is so for several reasons:

1. God tells us that we cannot go beyond His word. We are not to think beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). If we transgress the doctrine of Christ, then we lose fellowship with God (2 John 9). We are told, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).
2. It is the only way we can have proper faith. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). “Faith” derived from any other source is not true faith. Therefore, in order to be pleasing to God, we must abide within His word (John 8:31–32).
3. It is the only way that we can maintain proper unity among God’s people. God desires unity. True unity is not “unity in division,” but rather unity that is based upon the Bible. Ephesians 4:2–6 tells us to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Unity is based upon the “one faith.” We cannot please God while at the same time accepting many “faiths.” Therefore, we must go back to the Bible and abide therein.
4. We must go back to the Bible because of judgment. Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him: the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The basis upon which we will be judged is God’s word. Jesus also said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21–23). There will be many surprised people on the day of judgment, and the only way we can have confidence and not be ashamed when He comes again is to abide in Him and His word (1 John 4:28).
5. As mentioned, going back to the Bible is the only way that we can truly be

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Christians. If we do what they did in the first century, then we will be nothing more than simply Christians.

To be just a Christian, one must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of sins, confess Jesus as the Son of God, and be buried with Christ in baptism for the remission of sins (Hebrews 11:6; Acts 3:19; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 2:38). Once a Christian, one must find a local group of God's people to work and worship with. This is in order to meet other conditions that God has given in His word (see Hebrews 10:23–25; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19, etc.). Every Christian then must be faithful to God, growing in His grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Our goal is to please God and go to heaven. We wish to help as many as we can to do the same. Therefore, we must urge others to go back to the Bible, follow only what is written therein, and be simply Christians. Faithful churches of Christ do exist today, but the only way to know for sure is to test what is believed and practiced by the Bible.

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