

Being Ready With An Answer

July 1 - September 30, 2015

1 Peter 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence

Scripture commands that a Christian is to be one who is ready to answer the things that we are asked when the world observes our conduct. We cannot expect to have an answer to every question at every moment; indeed, our most common answer ought to be "I don't know, but I can find out" (see class 14).

For the purpose of this class we are selecting questions that would most likely be asked by a sincere seeker of truth or a Christian who is learning what it means to be a question. They do not primarily reflect the doctrinal differences between New Testament Christians and denominations (questions like "once saved always saved", original sin, transubstantiation, etc), although some of the answers we will cover also speak to false doctrines.

- (1) How do we know there is a God?
- (2) Why do we suffer?
- (3) How can we know that the Bible is true?
- (4) How can we know we are saved?
- (5) How can there be only one church?
- (6) Where was Jesus in the Old Testament?
- (7) Why are there no miracles today?
- (8) What about angels and demons?
- (9) Why did God change from the Old Testament to the New Testament?
- (10) Who is the Holy Spirit?
- (11) Why would a loving God send someone to Hell?
- (12) What are the end times?
- (13) Why can't people stop sinning?
- (14) What to do when we don't know the answer?

Class 1: How do we know there is a God?

July 1, 2015

Why do people ask: In the last century we have seen the rise of studies such as evolution that proclaims our ungodly origin; prehistory creating our unbiblical past; theology reforming our less than divine God, or psychology establishing our animalistic mind. It is no wonder then that many people ask the question: how do we know that there is a God?

How we answer: This is a question that may require us to step out of Scriptures for the answer, as many will view an answer from Scripture as merely *res ipsa loquitur* – the thing speaks for itself. But Scriptures tell us that God is also found outside of the Bible in Romans 1:20. There are several things which tell us there is a God.

1. Nature (Psalm 19:1)

- The irreducible complexity of life: One of the things we have come to learn about life and nature is that there is nothing “simple” about nature. We use the term “irreducible complexity” to express the idea that there are some things that are so complicated that even in their most basic forms they cannot be naturally fabricated. This is often compared to the nature of a watch; if we find something as complex as a watch, it implies (because of design) that there is a watchmaker (a designer).

- Fine-tuned universe: we now know that the conditions necessary for life in the universe are astronomically minimal; even atheists refer to the condition of the universe we live in as “*fine-tuned*”, indicating the existence of one who “fine-tunes” all things

2. Human Nature (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

- The Nature of Evil: CS Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* explained why he left atheism on this issue. If evil exists, then necessarily good does too. If good exists, then there is an absolute measure of good and evil that is not manmade.

- The Nature of the Divine Search: it is the case that all men have fashioned religion of some sort because of a distinct human need to know something beyond our observation.

3. The absence of viable alternatives (John 6:68-69)

- Many people are unaware that the general theory of evolution arose based not on observation but on presupposition, particularly that there can be no supernatural intervention in the universe. Evolution absolutely does not prove that there is no God; instead, it begins with the proposition that there is no God and then postulates means by which all things may exist.

- Evolution has a number of major weaknesses. First, it is not observed in nature. Second, it violates certain laws of nature (such as the laws of entropy). Finally, it has some morally repugnant fundamental principles (extreme racism, absence of value on human life) of which most people who believe are unaware.

Conclusion: While there are evidences of the existence of God, it is only the Bible that can define who He is and what our purpose in knowing Him must be.

Discussion Questions

1. What things have led people to question the existence of God? Is this something new?
2. According to Romans 1, what characteristics of God does nature reveal? What characteristics of God are NOT revealed in nature?
3. Why might some people choose to believe in evolution regardless of the weakness of the theories?

Class 2: Why Do We Suffer?

July 8, 2015

Why do people ask: this is one of the fundamental ancient questions of mankind: how can a God who is the very definition of God be both omnipotent and omniscience, yet allow evil and pain to exist? If God can stop evil, why does He choose not to do so?

How we answer: The Scriptures reveal that there is more than one answer as to why men suffer. It may be that more than one answer applies to a situation. While there is a great deal of information in the Bible available to answer this difficult question, but often times the answer people really want is not to know why, but to escape suffering. It is important then to be ready to answer this question as well (I Corinthians 10:13).

1. The Consequences of Sin (2 Samuel 12:13-14)

- We often point out that the eternal wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23). However, there are consequences to sin that are immediate and affect everyone. Consider that the whole of creation was cursed because of Adam, and we still suffer the consequences of that sin (Genesis 3:17-21). Very often the suffering we experience are the consequences of our own sins.
- The fact that sin has consequences here and now is to our benefit. It is hard to always have in mind the eternal wages of sin. But knowing that sinning can cause harm here and now offers us an important deterrent to committing sin.
- Some consequences of sin are inescapable. While becoming a Christian can remove the penalty(wages) of sin, people will still often have to live with the consequences of sin.

2. The Chastisement of God (James 1:2-4)

- We also know that sometimes suffering is necessary in order to cause us to grow. Hebrews 12:4-11 reminds us that God chastises us because of His love for us. There are many examples of the righteous enduring great obstacles to reach a greater purpose; Joseph's struggles in Egypt, Moses' exile in Midian; we can all understand that if we struggled
- Sometimes suffering is to our benefit, to strengthen us to accomplish more with ourselves.

3. Being Tested by God (Genesis 22:1)

- The story of Job is perhaps the most vivid lesson on suffering in the Bible. In that story Job suffered after Satan had received God's permission in order to ascertain if his righteous conduct was genuine. In Luke 22:31-34 Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked the same of him, and it had been granted; this came at the time where Peter denied Jesus.
- From Job another truth is revealed; we may never know why we suffer. Even at the end of the book, Job was never told why he experienced such sorrow.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do some ask about God's goodness when they suffer evil? Is it possible that no answer can satisfy the misery of suffering?
2. How can we know if we are suffering from the consequences of sin?
3. What can we do to endure the chastisement of God?
4. How can we deal with Job's dilemma of not knowing why we suffer?

Class 3: How can we know that the Bible is true?

July 15, 2015

Why do people ask: For the last century the academic world has been hostile to the Bible. It has gone to great lengths (universally fruitless) to disparage the Bible. Many denominations doubt the inspiration of Scriptures. Many ask because they have been told that the Bible has been over-translated and that it is full of contradictions.

How we answer: We need to discern what question is being asked: is the concern that the Bible is inspired, that it has been passed down safely, that it is without error, or that it is accurate in truth? These questions may require different answers. Understand this: most people are merely repeating statements they have heard.

1. The Inspiration of the Bible (II Timothy 3:16-17)

- Inspiration means that God authored the text by taking over the spirit of the human author (II Peter 1:21)
- Many are unaware that the Bible is one of only three ancient books today (*Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism, *Quran* of Islam) that claim to be inspired. It is the only book that maintains that inspiration can be transmitted in translation (inferred by OT quotes in the NT). It alone has a 1,500 year writing span.
- The concept of inspiration often appeals to the very existence of God. If there is a God, then how has He communicated to us fairly and completely? The only answer is by a divine message; meaning, if we did not know about the Bible, we might still know that something like the Bible must exist if God exists. If God cannot keep His message preserved, then how can He accomplish greater tasks?

2. Transmission of the Bible (I Peter 1:24-25)

- The greatest myth/lie about the Bible is that it has been translated many times and copied hundreds of times; thus many believe that the message has necessarily become diluted. However, the English Bible is the result of only one linguistic translation (Greek-English/Hebrew-English) and less than 20 copies (the oldest Bible manuscripts date to the 4th century).
- Evidence of the Bible's passage through time suggests that it has been supernaturally protected, as evidenced by the extraordinary number of ancient manuscripts (over 4000) that exist despite multiple official attempts to destroy it.

3. The absence of error in the Bible (Psalm 19:7)

- Many people have suggested the Bible is full of contradictions. Almost all of these contradictions are questions of doctrine that can be answered by simple text examination.
- There are some times where multiple accounts of one event provide details that require some attention to reconciliation. If we believe each account is true, passage reconciliation is not a difficult task.

4. Historical testimony (Acts 17:28)

- Most Christians take it for granted that the places and people mentioned in the Bible are also found outside the Bible, in history. Yet other religious texts (for example the Book of Mormon) have unsuccessfully attempted to find ANY historical verification for their records.
- Most of the events in the Bible have corresponding evidences in the world, from the flood of Noah (over 200 accounts exist that parallel the Bible) to the Gospel events.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this question's answer depend on the perspective of the questioner? In other words, if this question were asked by a Muslim, an atheist, or a Baptist, how might the answer vary?
2. If someone asked you what "inspired" means, with what answer would you be ready?
3. What are some historical evidences that support the veracity of the Bible?
4. How would we answer the question about the variations in English Bible translations?

Class 4: How Can We Know We Are Saved?

July 22, 2015

Why do people ask: Both Christians and others want to be certain of their salvation. Many turn to emotions (“*I feel it*”) or to confirmations by men (“*the preacher/priest/church said it*”). We know feelings can deceive us (Proverbs 14:12) and men can lie (Jeremiah 9:5). How can we know we are saved?

How we answer: There may be several ways to answer this, but there is one main passage that can be memorized for this purpose: I John 5:13. This passage is important because it is the ONLY passage in the Bible that directly tells us how we can know we are saved. In a generic sense this appeals to the entirety of Scripture. However, specifically it is referring to I John 5:6-9. In that passage it says that there are three things that testify to our salvation. They are:

1. The Blood (of Christ) (Hebrews 13:11-12)

- The expression “blood” in the New Testament, when used as a type, refers to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Acts 20:28, Romans 5:9, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:14). The blood of Christ was a purchase price (Acts 20:28) and the means of making sins forgiven (Hebrews 9:22).
- Thus the Blood testifies to the purchase of salvation.

2. The Spirit (of God) (John 6:63)

- The Spirit of God inspired men to reveal the Word of God to us (II Peter 1:20-21). His work then brings us life (2 Corinthians 3:6 with Philippians 2:16) through sanctification (2 Thessalonians 2:13 with John 17:17) by the revelation of Scriptures, or specifically, the plan of salvation.
- Thus the Spirit testifies to the revelation of our salvation.

3. The Water (of Baptism) (John 3:3-5)

- In Scripture we are told that it is in baptism that we come into contact with the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-6) and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, Titus 3:5). Since baptism is not all we must do to be saved, we can deduce that it includes our belief & confession, repentance, and continued obedience.
- Thus the Spirit testifies to our obedience acceptance God’s salvation (Romans 6:17)

Discussion Questions

1. Why might someone who is a Christian question whether or not they are saved?
2. Why do we that the work of the Spirit is accomplished through the Scriptures?
3. Is it true that everyone today has the blood and the Spirit? If so, if they do not have the water, does the blood and Spirit testify for them (see I John 5:6)?
4. Why would John use “water” to symbolize all we must do to be saved?
5. There are other ways to answer the question “how can we know we are saved”. How does the “parallel system” (i.e. seeing what another did to be saved and then acting in the same manner, as in Acts 15:11) confirm that we are saved?

Class 5: How can there be only one church?

July 29, 2015

Why do people ask: many people believe in a religious system called denominationalism, which suggests that there are many churches (not congregations, but distinct doctrinally defined organizations of multiple congregations), and that it does not matter which one we belong to in order to be right with God. Many will say “go to the church of your choice” or “All roads lead to heaven” to describe this.

How we answer: Many Christians are timid in making the claim that only the church of Christ is the church that Jesus built. During the 19th century many preachers taught this under the authority of unity. However, since the idea that Jesus died to make all men one (John 17:21, Ephesians 2:14-16) is the purpose of the Gospel, to accept the division of denominationalism is to say Jesus died in vain (Galatians 2:21).

1. There is only one church (Ephesians 4:4)

- Jesus said that He would build a church (Matthew 16:18), not many churches. When the Apostles spoke about the church in the New Testament, they described it as a single church (Ephesians 2:19-21)
- Although there are many congregations of the church, all men are placed into one church belonging to Christ (Colossians 3:15). There are many members, but only one church (I Corinthians 12:12,20).
- The statement that the church is only “one body” is found ten times in Scripture.

2. There is only one doctrine (I Timothy 3:15)

- Doctrine refers to the teaching of Christianity. The church that Jesus built has only one doctrine; denominations exist because they are separated by doctrinal differences. We cannot differ on doctrine and still all be the church Jesus built.
- We are told that there can be no other form of doctrine than what the Apostles have delivered to us in the New Testament (I Timothy 1:13). We are also told that if someone teaches any other doctrine they are to be rejected (Romans 16:17, I Timothy 6:3, II John 9).

3. The Importance of Unity (Psalm 133:1)

- Jesus built the church to be one (Philippians 2:2). Thus when the Apostles issued doctrine to the church, it was to all churches in Christ (I Corinthians 7:17, 16:1, I Thessalonians 2:14).
- We are told that in the church there is to be no division (I Corinthians 12:25). Those who cause division are to be removed (Titus 3:10, Jude 19).
- When the church in Corinth was divided in I Corinthians 1, Paul admonished them that this was wrong (I Corinthians 1:10)

Discussion Questions

1. As time passes, do we see people becoming less divided or more divided on doctrine in general? Are people more loosely or more tightly defining who can go to heaven?
2. What do we mean when we say “if there are many denominations, then Jesus died in vain”?
3. How might the preachers of the early 19th century have preached unity among the denominations?
4. How do different doctrines create denominations?
5. How can we be sure that WE (the sunset congregation) are the church of Christ?

Class 6: Where was Jesus in the Old Testament?

August 5, 2015

Why do people ask: Even in the time of Jesus, many were unsure how He could be the Son of God (John 5:18). Today, a number of people do not believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, or they believe that Jesus was not the Son of God until after His resurrection. Some of their disbelief is because they cannot see Jesus in the Old Testament. If Jesus existed before He was born, then His claim as being God in the flesh is validated (John 8:56-58).

How we answer: We need to have a confident answer that Jesus was the Son of God even before His virgin birth. We need to understand that while the name “Jesus” (in Hebrew, *Joshua*) was unknown as the Son of God in the Old Testament, there are numerous references to the Son of God in the Old Testament, and there are numerous statements about Jesus being in the Old Testament in the New Testament.

1. The Name “Jesus” is only one of many names the Son of God has held

- We know that Jesus (Christ is a title meaning “anointed one” or savior) was prophesied to be called *Immanuel* (God With us). We also know that Jesus had many titles, including Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Christ, Lord, Rabbi, the Word, etc. Therefore, we understand that the man Jesus was more than just a man named Jesus.

- His name (Jesus) means “*Jehovah Saves*”. This implies that His name was also Jehovah, that special name of God that was revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:11-15. We need to contrast this to what was said by Jesus in John 8:58 – that Jesus is Jehovah (“*I AM*”). Every OT reference to Jehovah (“*the LORD*”) is also Jesus.

2. Jesus is identified in the New Testament as having been present during events of the Old Testament.

- Paul says that Jesus was the Rock that brought forth water in I Corinthians 10:1-4 / Exodus 17:6.

- Jesus said that Abraham met Him in John 8:56

- We are told that all things were created by and through Jesus – John 1:3, Hebrews 1:2, & Colossians 1:16

3. There are many references in the Old Testament to the Son of God. There is a Son of God spoken about in Psalm 2:12, Daniel 3:25, Isaiah 9:6.

4. Jesus *may* have been the Angel of the Lord

- The Angel of the Lord is referenced often in the OT (Exodus 3:2, Joshua 5:14, Judges 6:11, etc.)

- Sometimes the Angel of the Lord is called God Himself (Judges 6:22) or He is soon referred to as God (Exodus 3:2 and 4, Joshua 5:15 and 6:2)

5. Jesus *may* have been the manifestation of God that men met in the Old Testament

- We are told that God cannot be seen by men (Exodus 33:20) and that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18. 1 John 4:12). We presume that this refers to the Father, who dwells in Heaven and is unapproachable (I Timothy 6:16).

- Therefore, it may be a reasonable conclusion that anytime men spoke to God face to face, they actually spoke to Jesus (examples:

Discussion Questions

1. What is the distinction or difference in the title “*Son of Man*” and “*Son of God*”?

2. What does Paul mean to tell us that Jesus was the rock in I Corinthians 10:4? What did the rock do that Jesus does (John 4:14)?

3. Why might Jesus’ identity been hidden in the Old Testament (Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:4-6)?

Class 7: Why are there no miracles today?

August 12, 2015

Why do people ask: There are two perspectives that we may need to have an answer on this issue. First, there are people who believe that there are miracles today to the same degree as in the first century. Second, there are those today who see the clear absence of miracles today and question the existence of God. We need to be ready to tell all why there have been miracles in the past, but in these last days they are no longer present.

How we answer: First it is necessary to explain what a miracle is in the Bible (also called signs and wonders). A miracle is an event that defies or violates the laws of nature. Providence is God working within the laws of nature to provide something. Many people say “miracle” and mean “providence”. Secondly, we need to explain what miracles were for, and why they are no longer necessary.

1. We Do Not Need It

- Miracles are proof of authority (Matt 10:1), Matt 9:5-6 (Matt 16). They always accompany the revelation of God. Since we are told that God’s revelation is complete (Jude 3, II Timothy 3:16-17), we understand that there is no purpose today for miracles. Everything it was needed for (authority) is complete.
- The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are present today as the perfected Word of God (II Peter 1:19-21).

2. We Can Not Have It

- If miracles are to demonstrate God’s revelation, we ought to understand that a desire for miracles is a desire for a new revelation or covenant (Hebrews 2:3-4). There is/will be no new revelation or covenant, and desiring one is a sin. We should not desire miracles for that reason (Matthew 16:4).

3. We Were Told It Was Not Permanent

- We are told in Scripture that miracles would cease (I Corinthians 13:8-10)

4. We Were Shown It Was Not Permanent

- We see in Acts 8:14-16 that the miraculous gifts could not be passed on except by an Apostle (Acts 19:6, 2 Corinthians 12:12). We know that there are no Apostles today based on their qualifications (Acts 1:21-22). Therefore, there is no one who is able to pass on these gifts

5. Where Is It?

- No real 1st century miracles occur today. Many claim to speak in tongues today, but they do not (see Acts 2:4,8, I Corinthians 14:10). No one raises others from the dead or restores sight. Etc. Instead, we see tricks or ignorance or what might be providence.

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example of a miracle and an example of providence from the Scriptures.
2. How are miracles a proof of authority? Why is providence NOT a proof of authority?
3. Some still claim that there are apostles present today. How might we reply to this?
4. If someone tells you that they witnessed a miracle, how might you reply?

Class 8: What about angels and demons?

August 19, 2015

Why do people ask: There has always been a fascination with the idea of interaction with spiritual beings. The Catholic Church has developed an extensive hierarchy of angels. More than half of Americans (53 percent) believe that they have personally been saved from harm by a guardian angel. We need to have some answers about spiritual beings.

How we answer: Often it is best not to dispute when we cannot know the answer. We do know the Devil, angels and demons are present in the world (Ephesians 6:12), and may have interacted indirectly with people. However, many times people believe things that are contrary to Scripture; for this we need to have ready an answer.

1. What we need to know about Satan

- There is not much background information on the Devil (*Satan* in the OT; both names mean *opponent*; the name *Lucifer* in Isaiah 14:12 is NOT the Devil (vs 4)). Nothing states that Satan was ever an angel. As well, He does not "rule" from Hell (He will not be cast there until the end- Revelation 20:10). The Bible states that the earth is his domain (Job 1:7, 1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 2:2, 1 John 5:19, 2 Corinthians 4:4). The power Satan is given is the power of death (Hebrews 2:14, Ephesians 6:12), and that (to some degree) his power is divinely given (Job 1:12). His power is revoked over those who are in Christ (Hebrews 2:14, etc.).

- We are also told that Satan has a purpose: accusation. He is called the accuser in Revelation 12:10, we see his accusations in Job 1&2 against Job, and we see such against Peter in Luke 22:31. In the events in the Garden we see that Satan, while tempting Eve, did not compel her to sin. Satan is our tempter, but he is NOT the cause of our fall.

2. What we need to know about demons

- Like Satan, not much is said about the identity of demons. They too are not identified as fallen angels (they are called the Devil's "angels" in Matthew 25:41). Demons are behind the false gods of the world (revealed in Deuteronomy 32:17 and I Corinthians 10:20). We are also told that false doctrines have a demonic origin (I Timothy 4:1, James 3:15).

- In the first century demons had the ability to possess and control people to a limited. There are no demon possessions (demoniacs) found in the entire Old Testament. Their presence was, like miracles, to testify to the power of Jesus (Mark 1:27).

3. What we need to know about angels

- The word angel literally means "messengers of God". In the Bible they are seen either as indescribable beings (Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4) or as men (Genesis 19:1, Acts 1:10), but never as two winged people. Their number is uncountable (Hebrews 12:22). Only two angels are named in the Bible (Michael and Gabriel). They are of a higher order than man (Psalm 8:5) and they are sometimes called *Cherubim* (and one time *Seraphim* (Isaiah 6:2,6), which may only be describing their appearance).

- Their purpose is of ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14). They also report to God our conduct (as in Genesis 18:21 w/ 19:1, Revelation 1-3, Hebrews 12:22). ONLY in the Old Testament were angels bringers of Law (Acts 7:53, Hebrews 2:2). It is clearly stated in Hebrews 1:1-2 and 2:3 that this is no longer the case.

- We are commanded not to worship angels (Revelation 22:8, Colossians 2:18-19).

Discussion Questions

1. Why are we not to revile Satan per Jude 8-10?
2. How might we answer people who claim to have had an experience with a guardian angel?

Class 9: Why did God change the Old to the New Testament? August 26, 2015

Why do people ask: Since most of the content of the Bible is the Old Testament, many people may ask us why it is the New Testament that is our guide. There are some who believe that commandments in the Old Testament are as important as the New; others say that if we just live by the Ten Commandments, we are okay.

How we answer: Paul said that if the Old Testament is still in effect, then Jesus died in vain (Galatians 2:21). We need to explain that we could not be saved without a New Covenant, and that we must live in that covenant alone (John 14:6). We need to be able to explain why the Old Testament needed to be replaced, and how the New Testament did so.

1. What was the Old Testament?

- The word *testament* means *covenant*, an unbreakable oath or agreement that includes a law/rule and a promise/reward (Galatians 3:15, Hebrews 8:6, Hosea 8:1). If someone breaks a covenant they are in a worse condition than before (2 Peter 2:20)(ex. Marriage – Rom. 7:1-4).
- The Old Testament was made with Moses at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:28-29, Jeremiah 31:32). The Law was the Law of Moses (Exodus 24:12) and the promise was the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 27:3).

2. Why was the Old Testament replaced?

- We are told that the Old Testament had flaws (Hebrews 8:7). Chief of which was the absence of a means of perfecting or forgiving those who failed it (Hebrews 7:18-19, Acts 13:39). Another flaw was that the carnal nature of the administrations (priesthood, temple, etc.) which failed often (Hebrews 7:11).
- It is clear that there was a plan even before Moses received (Galatians 3:17) or delivered (Deuteronomy 18:15) the old covenant that it was temporary, and that a new one would come (Jeremiah 31:31-33).
- The Old Testament was a tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24, Colossians 2:17, Romans 10:4).
- The Old Testament could only be replaced by the death of the one who made it (Hebrews 9:16, Romans 7:1-4). Thus, when Jesus died, the Old Testament was ended (Colossians 2:14, Ephesians 2:15).

3. What is the New Testament?

- The New Testament (II Corinthians 3:6) is the covenant Christ purchased with His blood (I Corinthians 11:25). It consists of the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2, James 2:12, Romans 8:2) and the promise of eternal life in Christ (Acts 2:39, 2 Timothy 1:1, Hebrews 4:1).
- All men will be judged by the Law of Christ (James 2:12, John 12:47-48). However, not all will receive the gift of eternal life.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul mean to tell us that if the Old Testament could remain in effect, Jesus died in vain?
2. Why is it that many of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) appear in the law of Christ (James 2:8-12)?
3. In what way did were the physical/carnal things of the Old Law replaced by spiritual images in the New Law?

Class 10: Who is the Holy Spirit?

September 2, 2015

Why do people ask: There is a great deal of confusion about the identity and work of the Holy Spirit today. Even in the New Testament, men asked whether there was a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2). There are many misconceptions about the identity of the Holy Spirit. Some view the Holy Spirit as a mystical force. Others understand the Holy Spirit as the impersonal power that God makes available to followers of Christ.

How we answer: The simple and obvious answer is that the Holy Spirit is God (John 4:24). The Bible also tells us that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, a being with a mind, emotions, and a will. It becomes more complex when we answer how it is that we interact with the Holy Spirit. While there are many opinions, the Bible indicates that our interaction with the Holy Spirit today is via the Inspired Word of God.

1. The Identity of the Holy Spirit

- He is not a manifestation of the Father (Luke 11:13, John 14:26, 15:26) or Jesus (John 6:63, 16:13-14). Instead, He is spoken of as separate from the Father & the Son (Matt 3:16-17). Instead, He is God and has the characteristics of God. He is omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), omnipresent (Psalms 139:7), omnipotent (Psalm 104:30), and eternal (Hebrews 9:14). He has divine qualities such as Grace (Hebrews 10:29), divine goodness (Nehemiah 9:20), and He is truth (John 16:13).

2. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God (Scriptures)

- When we examine the work the Holy Spirit does in our lives, we also see that the Word does the same work in the life of the Christian:

The Spirit dwells in us - James 4:5	The Word dwells in us - Colossians 3:16
The Spirit "gives birth" to us - John 3:8	The Word "gives birth" to us - 1 Peter 1:23
The Spirit gives us life - 2 Corinthians 3:6	The Word gives us Life - Philippians 2:16
The Spirit is the guarantee of Salvation - 2 Corinthians 1:22	The Word is the guarantee of Salvation - 1 John 5:13
The Spirit sanctifies us - 2 Thessalonians 2:13	The Word sanctifies us - John 17:17
The Spirit convicts and judges - John 16:8	The Word convicts and judges - Titus 1:9, John 12:48
The Spirit gives us power - Romans 15:13	The Word gives us power - Hebrews 4:12
The Spirit comforts us - Acts 9:31	The Word comforts us - Romans 15:4
The Spirit testifies of God - Romans 8:16	The Word testifies of God - John 5:39

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the names in the Bible that the Holy Spirit uses?
2. What ways in the past has the Holy Spirit appeared to men?
3. How is it that Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26) led to the New Testament?
4. What are some of the errors taught about the Holy Spirit today?
5. What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 12:31, Mark 3:28-29, and how does this prove that the Holy Spirit is God?

Class 11: Why Would A Loving God Send People to Hell?

September 9, 2015

Why do people ask: Everybody is scared of Hell. The Bible desires that we use that fear to motivate ourselves to obedience (Matthew 5:29). However, the alternative some people seek is to mitigate or invalidate the idea of Hell. Others simply do not understand what Hell is about or who is destined for Hell.

How we answer: Scriptural answers about Hell save souls. We need to be ready to explain what Hell is, prove from Scripture that it is real, and explain what we must do to avoid it. We may need gentleness with some (particularly involving the loss of unbelieving loved ones), but with others we may need to be quite blunt. But everyone needs to know about Hell.

1. We need to be prepared to answer that Hell is real.

- Too many people have been led to believe that Hell is not real. There are many passages in the Bible that warn us about Hell (Matthew 5:29-30; Matthew 18:9; Mark 9:43-47). None of them do so indicating that Hell is merely a metaphor for suffering in this life; instead, they describe it consistently as an eternal place after this life is over.

2. We need to be able to explain what Hell is in the Bible.

- There is some confusion between language about Hell and about Hades (some Bible translations (KJV/NKJV) do not clarify the distinction). Hades is a representation (either literal or figurative) of the place of the dead (righteous or unrighteous; Jesus went to Hades, Acts 2:31). Hell (coming from the word *Gehenna*, originally a valley near Jerusalem, mentioned in Jeremiah 7:31-32, 19:1-6) is the location of all those who will receive at the day judgment eternal condemnation (Matthew 23:23). Therefore, while all who have died are in the authority or realm of Hades, no one is in Hell yet.

- Since we know Hell is the final eternal place of the condemned, we know that it is also called the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10-14), eternal condemnation (Mark 3:29), resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29).

3. We need to explain how God's justice requires Hell.

- Many are confused that a loving God could create an eternal torment. What people do not fathom is that it must exist because man is an eternal being (being created in the image of God, Genesis 1:27), and that it is the nature of God that sinful man cannot exist in the presence of God (Psalm 68:2, Isaiah 6:5). God's nature is both loving and just (Psalm 7:11); He cannot permit sin to be unpunished by that same nature, and therefore there must be a penalty for sin.

- Perhaps the greater issue for most is that while they might agree some deserve Hell (ask them if a terrible tyrant or murderer belongs in Hell), they feel that they ought not to be concerned about Hell, because they see themselves as a good person. The real issue of Hell for most is not that it is not fair, but that they do not see their own conduct as deserving of it.

4. We need to explain that God has done EVERYTHING in His power to keep us out of Hell.

- God provided a scheme of redemption that can fully atone for the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). He has revealed this plan to all men. No one has to go to Hell; it is completely our decision.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the false teachings about Hell?

2. Why does teaching about Hell save souls?

3. How can we know when to be blunt and when to be delicate in teaching about Hell?

4. Why does the just nature of God require that Hell exist?

5. What do we mean when we say "God has done everything in His power to save us from Hell"?

Class 12: What are the end times?

September 16, 2015

Why do people ask: Teaching about the end of time is probably one of the most popular teachings today. It is a very new doctrine (only 200 years old). Particularly among Protestant churches there is a great deal of false doctrine on the subject; even those denominations that do not officially teach it are full of members who have believed many ideas on it today. Typically these ideas are summed up in the false doctrine called “premillennialism”, which teaches Jesus’ kingdom did not come with His resurrection and church, but has yet to come.

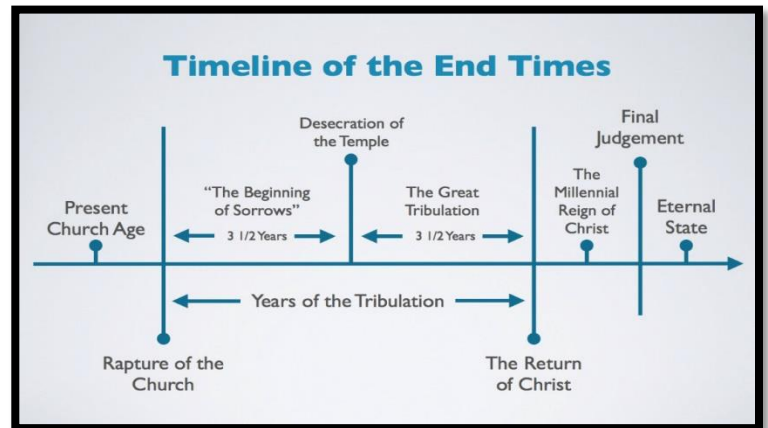
How we answer: In this subject we have a very simple answer to most of the questions asked about the end of time: “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only*” (Matthew 24:36, also Mark 13:32, Luke 12:40). It is stated throughout the New Testament by the writers thereof that there will be no sign or warning before Jesus’ return. However, interaction with others will likely require us to have a more specific answer to more specific issues raised.

1. We need to have some knowledge on what is taught or commonly believed.

- Most end times doctrines are taken from Matthew 24/Mark 13.

- We need to know what people mean when they refer to: *tribulation* (a period of great suffering lasting seven years immediately before Jesus returns); *rapture* (a removal of the saints from the earth either before or during the “tribulation” period); *antichrist* (a single world ruler who will persecute Christians).

- We need to know that they likely believe that there will be a series of world events (taken from a literal view of Matthew 24:6-7) that then culminate with **this chart** (with some variations):



2. We need to be able to explain the Bible says.

- The most important verse we need to know is Matthew 24:34 (*assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*), which tells us that the events of Matthew 24:1-33 occurred 2000 years ago.

- These false doctrines begin by mis-stating Bible truths. According to the Bible: *tribulation* occurred 2000 years ago (Revelation 1:9); *rapture* is found nowhere in the Bible; *antichrists* (plural) are anyone who teaches falsely, and they existed 2000 years ago (1 John 2:18-19).

- Most importantly, we need to teach people that Jesus’ Kingdom is His church. It was prophesied in the OT to begin when Jesus came (Isaiah 2:2-3, Daniel 2:44, 7:14); in the NT, the term kingdom and church are both used interchangeably (Matthew 16:18 and 19; Hebrews 12:23 and 28).

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the recent nature of this doctrine something significant to tell others?
2. Why is it so dangerous for people to believe the false end-times teachings?
3. What conclusions should people make based on Matthew 24:36 about the way they live their lives? How do the parables of Matthew 24:44-51 and Matthew 25 re-emphasize this?

Class 13: Why do people sin?

September 23, 2015

Why do people ask: Both Christians and those who are not Christians but are believers in God struggle to understand why we sin, and how to stop sinning. Some have been taught that it is our nature to sin; others may think that God allows us to sin, but as long as it is not a “big” sin, it is okay.

How we answer: We need to be able to convince people that it is completely in their power to turn away from sin. Jesus said “sin no more”; it must then be possible to leave sin (Acts 26:18).

1. What is sin?

- We should know that the Bible defines sin as lawlessness in I John 3:4 and 5:17. Therefore, anyone who has violated (God’s) law has sinned.
- We should know that the wages of all sin (whether great or small) is spiritual (not physical) death (Romans 6:23).
- Every person is held accountable for their own sins (Ezekiel 18:20).

2. Why do we sin?

- The Bible does not say even once that we have a sinful nature, nor does it mention a doctrine called Original Sin (a teaching that we inherited the guilt of Adam’s sins). Thus we do not sin because of an uncontrollable compulsion or nature.
- We do not sin because Satan forces us to sin. The Bible is clear that Satan does tempt us to sin (Matthew 4:3), but He is not the reason we sin. This can be seen in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-19).
- We sin because we do not rule our desires by our will power (James 1:13-15). Our desires are rooted in the things of the world (I John 2:16). Therefore, the world is the passage through which our desire arrives in our hearts, and our desires are the incubator for our sins.

3. How do we learn to stop sinning?

- First, we need to agree that we must stop sinning, and we must agree that it can be done. However, it may be that we cannot do it alone. It may be that we need the aid of brethren to cease from sin (Galatians 6:1-2, James 5:16). It is not something we can do easily or quickly; thus we are told to confess our sins to God (I John 2:1) when we fail to put off sin.
- Second, we need to change the desires of our heart through spiritual growth (Galatians 5:16-17).
- Third, we need to cut off the avenue by which the world enters into our lives (I John 2:15-17)

Discussion Questions

1. Sin is sometimes described as “missing the mark” (GR. *Hamartano*). What does this mean?
2. Why does believing that we are sinful by nature lead us to committing more sin?
3. How does someone spiritually die?
4. If we are each to receive the wages of our own sins, why did David’s son die in 2 Samuel 12:19?

Class 14: What to do when we don't know the answer?

September 30, 2015

Why do people ask: The purpose of our study has been to equip ourselves with memorable answers to common questions people ask about Christianity. However, there will be many questions that are not easily answered, and we may not know what the answer is or how to answer it. Finally, there is not an answer to every question (Acts 1:7).

How we answer: In this case, we need to learn how to discern when the question is one which we need to learn, or if there is no answer. In some ways it is more important to understand what we should not do in the face of a difficult question.

1. We should not guess or offer opinion as fact.

- When we are uncertain of the answer, we need to be clear to say that we do not know. Our credibility is not based on our mind, but on what God has revealed; therefore, it is completely reasonable and appropriate to say "I don't know" (Proverbs 17:28,
- We should not be too proud to deny that we do not know; even the wisest of men in the bible admitted that they did not know all things (Proverbs 30:1-6; Philippians 3:13).
- Every person is held accountable for their own sins (Ezekiel 18:20).

2. When we do not know the answer we should seek it out.

- Jesus often taught things the disciples did not understand. They would then come to Him and seek an explanation. An example of this is the parable of the soils in Mark 4:1-11; when the disciples inquired to understand, Jesus made it clear that their inquiry made them recipients of the blessings of God.
- Jesus's apostles possessed this virtue – they were quick to admit they did not know and not content to simply remain ignorant (John 14:5, John 16:18). Jesus has said that if we seek, we will find (Matthew 7:7).

3. We need to understand that there are some things we cannot know.

- We do not know when Jesus will return (Matthew 24:36), what our resurrected bodies will be like exactly (1 John 3:2), what our life will be like tomorrow (James 4:14), and even sometimes how prayer works (Romans 8:26). We are told that we cannot know these things.
- We need to learn that sometimes the *"secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us"* (Deuteronomy 29:29). If something pertaining to Spiritual matters is not revealed in Scripture, then likely it is not ours to know.

Conclusion: Every Christian needs to practice saying this: *"I don't know, but I will find out"*.

Discussion Questions

1. Sometimes people ask questions that they already know the answer. How do we apply Matthew 7:6 in those situations?
2. Why is it so difficult to say "I don't know"? What might that reveal about our mindset towards Scriptures?
3. How do we seek out the answers to difficult questions?