



Special Challenges Regarding the Bible Studies

SETTING UP A STUDY

Christians who seem to have constant opportunities for one-on-one Bible studies with their friends and acquaintances share several characteristics. The most prominent one is that they *ask* people to study. You can set up studies simply by asking, "Have you ever had a systematic study of the Bible? Would you like to?" Here is an example of how one soul-winner interested a young woman in a Bible study:

"May I share some interesting questions with you? Don't answer the questions; just tell me which one you find the most interesting."

"Okay," she said.

The Christian asked, "Is there a God? If so, who is He? Is there a Day of Judgment?"

She replied, "Wow, those are all good questions. I guess the one about the Day of Judgment is the most interesting to me."

Then the soul-winner asked, "Why is that question most interesting?"

She thought and then responded, "Because I was raised in a strict background, but I rebelled. I believe in God, but I am pretty sure I'm not ready for the Day of Judgment."

"What do you think about the Bible?" was the next question presented.

She answered, "My dad used to make us read it, but I haven't read it in a long time."

Venturing further, the Christian inquired, "How do you feel about that?"

"Well, not very good," she said.

This led to the key question: "Would you like to read from your own Bible and find out what it has to say about being ready for judgment?"

"Yes," she replied.

That woman is now a Christian.

When someone shows an interest in studying, offer a choice rather than an open invitation. Ask, "Which is better for you, morning or evening?" When the time is decided, offer choices between specific days until an appointment is set. Write down the date and time of the appointment, along with your name, for your student. It is also appropriate to leave him a copy of the first lesson. ❖

HELPING OTHERS TO DECIDE TO BECOME CHRISTIANS

When I began conducting Bible studies, I became very discouraged. Several people agreed to study the Bible with me, but none of the studies resulted in a conversion to Christ.

I now realize what I was doing wrong. First, I forgot the truth that my responsibility is to plant the seed and God's is to give the increase. Second, I failed to *ask* people to obey the gospel. During a gospel meeting, I took the preacher to visit those who had studied with me. Then something amazing happened: They all decided to be baptized! He asked them, "What do you think of the studies you and Mike had?" Their responses were positive. "Why didn't you obey the gospel?" he inquired. "He didn't ask," each one replied. Do your best. Do not be discouraged when you make mistakes, but do not make the mistake of failing to ask people to obey Christ.

The summary section of lesson 4, "The Gospel," is designed to bring the student to a point of decision. Several suggestions for closing and persuading are offered in the lesson "The Gospel." If the student chooses not to obey the gospel, he will have another opportunity at the conclusion of the lesson "The Church." If he refuses to obey after that lesson, be sure to leave the door open for teaching. Pray for him, invite him to worship services and church activities, and give him appropriate books, tracts, and tapes.

If you think your student may be ready to be baptized, make the physical arrangements in advance. One who is really convicted will not want to remain any longer in a lost condition by delaying obedience to the gospel.

Some may want to wait until others can be present as they are baptized. Remind them of the urgency of obedience. Make sure they understand the consequences if Jesus were to come that night. However, I strongly advise that you contact the parents before baptizing a young person. ❖

NOTES ON LESSON 4: THE GOSPEL

(Also see “The Gospel” and “Answer Guide for Teachers”)

Lesson 4 begins with the arrest and trial of Jesus. Emphasis is placed on the fact that Jesus came to the earth of His own free will. The physical nature of the cross is considered, but not at the expense of the spiritual nature of Jesus’ death. Emphasis is placed on the fact that Jesus stayed on the cross because of (1) His love, (2) our sins, and (3) His obedient spirit. He became sin for us. Adequate time must be spent considering the biblical teaching about repentance, the blood of Christ, and the role of baptism in obeying the gospel.

Matthew 26:47–57 and *27:27–55*. This section focuses on Jesus’ betrayal by Judas, Peter’s attempt to defend Jesus, and Jesus’ voluntary acceptance of the cross. Even though some in the crowd called on Him to come down off the cross, Jesus endured the cross. The next three sections develop the thought that even though He could have called more than twelve legions of angels, He did not.

Why Did Jesus Stay on the Cross?

(1) His Love for You and Me

John 15:13; 10:14–18 through *John 3:16*. Be sure to ask the open questions provided in this section. While the student should read most of the questions, it has proven effective for the teacher to read the open questions, or thought questions. After reading *Luke 23:34*, you can take a blank sheet of paper and draw a cross. As the lesson progresses, write the nails (reasons) that kept Jesus on the cross. Special emphasis should be placed on the fact that Jesus voluntarily stayed on the cross. It was not the physical nails or the Roman soldiers that held Him there, but something else. The first nail (reason), then, was His love for you and me. Read *John 3:16* to emphasize Jesus’ incredible love.

John 1:1–18; Colossians 2:9 through *John 14:6, 15*. The death of Jesus seems even more wonderful as the student considers these Scriptures which point out the deity, power, and role of Jesus. In contemplating the role of Jesus in Creation, how the world holds together through Him, and how He explains God to us, the honest seeker will be greatly encouraged. The death of Jesus takes on a different look when we understand who was on that cross. Give your student a chance to respond

mentally and emotionally. After reading *John 14:15*, ask, “How can you show your love to God?” Then say, “Explain what that means to you personally.”

(2) My Sins and Yours

1 Peter 2:21–25 through *Genesis 3:10–12*. These verses are important as you lead your student to see that the second nail (reason) that held Jesus to the cross is sin—my sins and yours. Jesus did not commit any sin; but, according to the Scriptures, He bore our sins in His body on the cross. Not only did He die for our sins, but He was made to *become* sin on our behalf. The physical pain pales in comparison to what it meant for the sinless Son of God to become sin. As you discuss this section, you can write on the cross drawn earlier, “My sins and yours.” Then ask the thought question “How does this make you feel?” You can also use the sketched cross in another way: Say, “To help me visualize Jesus bearing my sin, I will write a few of my sins on the cross.” Do this, and then encourage the student to do the same.

As you discuss the sins listed in *Galatians 5:19–21*, make sure that your student understands what these sins are. This discussion will help him to understand the relevance of the Bible and perhaps evaluate his own sin debt. *Genesis 3:10–12* shows Adam and Eve’s attempt to excuse their sin. Discuss other human solutions, such as denying our sins or blaming others.

Study the Scriptures on repentance carefully to help your friend (by this point your student will have become your friend) come to repentance. True conversion cannot occur without repentance. Repentance cannot occur without godly sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:9, 10. Biblical baptism requires biblical repentance. God wants everyone to repent (*Acts 17:30, 31*). Many, however, confuse sorrow and repentance. In these Scriptures Paul’s words point out that repentance is caused by godly sorrow. It is important to make sure that the student understands this. Also, it is good to point out that “repentance leads to salvation” and salvation thus involves more than sorrow and repentance.

(3) Obedience to God

Hebrews 5:8, 9. The third nail (reason) that held

Jesus to the cross was His commitment to obeying the Father. Write the words “obedience to God” on the cross you have drawn. At this point, it would be appropriate to ask, “If God expected His Son to obey, what about you and me?”

1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Romans 6:15–18. Many non-Christians believe that they are too bad to be forgiven. This section shows the kind of people in Corinth who had become Christians. This discussion is not meant to minimize sin, but to exalt the blood of Jesus. Romans 6:15–18 points out that everyone has a choice as to whom they will obey.

2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; 1 Peter 4:17. Not only do we have a choice as to *whom* we will obey, but also *what* we will obey. Paul and Peter emphasized obedience to the gospel. The consequences of failing to obey the gospel are presented in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9: eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord. An obvious question should surface at this point: “Have I obeyed the gospel?” Too much is at stake simply to assume obedience. The next few verses are crucial to the student’s proper understanding of how to obey the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:1–7. Paul declared that the gospel is of first importance. Why is it of first importance? Because we are saved by the gospel. What is the gospel, according to this passage? It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. To reinforce the resurrection of Jesus, review the three nails and then turn to Matthew 28:1–18.

At this point, have the student answer the question “Do you believe you have obeyed the gospel?” I usually read this question and then wait silently for the answer. If your student says “no,” skip the chart following the question. If he says “yes,” ask him to take a moment and answer the boxed questions (the survey) without comment. Sometimes a student will want to discuss his answers right then. Don’t do it. If someone says he does not remember what happened when he was “saved,” tell him to write down what happened as he best recalls it. Later on, you will have an opportunity to remind the student that perhaps if he does not know why he was baptized, he should make his calling and election sure. After he completes the survey, go on to the next question. Emphasize the key words in 1 Corinthians 15:1–7: “died,” “buried,” “raised,” and “appeared.”

Romans 6:1–4 through Revelation 1:4–6; Acts 22:6–16. Romans 6 shows that we obey the gospel as we die to sin when we are buried in baptism. Then we rise to walk in newness of life. Be sure to point out the word “burial” as it relates to bap-

tism. Colossians 2:12 can also be used to point out that biblical baptism is by immersion. Emphasize death, burial, and resurrection and how we reenact the gospel when we obey it. You can demonstrate that those who have been buried with Christ are baptized into Christ, baptized into His death, united with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life.

John 19:31–34 shows that Jesus shed His blood in His death. Jesus said in Matthew 26 that His blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Peter taught that sins are forgiven when one repents and is baptized. Therefore, the blood of Jesus forgives us when we repent and are baptized. Simply stated, *baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.*

Hebrews 9 shows the relationship between the cleansing of the conscience and the blood of Jesus. First Peter 3:21, 22 proclaims that the blood of Jesus cleanses the conscience at baptism and saves us through the resurrection of Jesus.

These verses should be enough to show that we experience the benefits of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus when we believe, repent, and are buried with Christ in baptism. That is how one obeys the gospel.

Which Is Correct?

Have your student read Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:36–38. Then point out that Jesus mentioned belief, then baptism, and then salvation. Peter taught belief, repentance, baptism, and then salvation. Various religious groups today teach concepts that are contrary to what Jesus and Peter said. Next, ask to see the student’s responses to the questions in the box, if he answered them. Discuss whether or not what he did to be saved is consistent with what the Scriptures teach. If the student says “yes” but his answers in the survey are contradictory, try to help him see the difference. If he insists that he has been baptized for the right reason, ask, “If you had died before being baptized, would you have gone to heaven?” The student may ask if you think that matters. Go back to the cross with the three nails and remind him of Hebrews 5:8, 9. Turn also to John 14:15, Luke 6:46, John 8:32, and Galatians 1:6–9 if needed.

Ecclesiastes 8:11; 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Matthew 7:13, 14, 21–27. These passages remind the reader of the certainty of Judgment Day, the seriousness of Judgment Day, and the importance of obedience to the will of God. This lesson ends where the first lesson began, with the “wise” men and the “foolish” men.

Review & Summary

Read and obtain an answer for each of the review questions. When you come to the question "Have you obeyed the gospel?" read the question and then remain silent until an answer is given. If the student says "no," go directly to the last question, "When should you make the decision to obey the gospel?" If he says "now," ask him if he is ready to be baptized and obey the gospel right now. He may say "yes." If he says "no," ask, "What is keeping you from obeying the gospel?" Try to deal with any objections, but do not "pick green fruit." Nothing would be accomplished by convincing a student to be baptized if he is not ready to repent and give his life to Christ.

Avoid manipulation or coercion, but do not be afraid to persuade. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a persuasion that is biblical. (See 2 Corinthians 5:11; Acts 2:40; Acts 18:4; Acts 19:8; Acts 28:23.) If your prospect has honestly studied the Scriptures he has read throughout these lessons, then he surely wants to do what is right. As objections are offered, take courage; this is a person who simply needs help in making the right decision. I have learned that it is helpful to *expect* the student to obey the gospel. This is not being naïve. The student who has reached this point in the lesson series has spent hours studying the Word of God, and the Word of God is powerful (1 Corinthians 1:18; see Hebrews 4:12). Help him to make the right decision by reviewing appropriate Scriptures that he has already embraced. Ask open questions such as "How much of the Word of God should be obeyed?" or "If a friend asked you what to do to obey the gospel, what would you tell him?" Remind the student of Jesus' obedience.

You might appeal to self-interest (Acts 2:40), the quality of life (John 10:10), freedom from sin (John 8:31–36), influence on others (Matthew 18:6–10; Luke 16:19–28), or gratitude. Reassure the student that he cannot go wrong if he does what God says. Remind him that in Lesson 1 he expressed a desire to be a "wise man."

At this point, you will clearly see why it is so important to have your students read and make personal application of each Scripture. If you have reinforced right answers and a willingness to change, and have encouraged commitment to the truths being taught, then you will be privileged to hear many say, "Yes, I am ready to obey the gospel." Do not give up on those who are not ready, and do not pressure them. Let the Scriptures admonish them. One more study remains in this

series, and there will be another opportunity to persuade. Remember that the lost have everything to gain and nothing to lose by your efforts. ❖

Sample Dialogue—Teaching "The Gospel"

Everyone is seated at the table with Bibles, pencils, and lessons. The study has progressed to the second page of the lesson "The Gospel." The students have filled in the box under the heading "Which Is Correct?" without comment.

Teacher: We will come back to these answers later. Let's review for a minute. Should you change your beliefs just because someone tells you something is true?

Chad: No, I remember that we are supposed to check out everything in the Bible—even what you tell us. Is that why we are reading these verses for ourselves?

Teacher: That's right. Now, Janet, will you please read Mark 16:16? [She accidentally reads from the wrong chapter.] Excuse me, Janet, I believe we are one chapter off.

Janet: Oh, I'm sorry. I have it this time. "He that believes and is baptized. . . ."

Teacher: Thank you. Did Jesus teach belief, then baptism, then salvation?

Janet: That is what it says.

Chad: That seems clear.

Teacher: Very good, Chad. Would you read the next Scripture? [He reads Acts 2:36–38.] Thank you. Do you agree with this chart?

Chad: Peter said belief, then baptism, then salvation. Wait, that is not what I have been taught.

Teacher: What do you believe, then?

Chad: [He rereads the Scripture and then the chart.] Well, I guess that now I believe what the chart shows—like the Bible says.

Teacher: You guess, or you know?

Chad: I *know*. I believe what the Bible says.

Janet: Then babies should not be baptized. They can't believe, can they?

Teacher: That is an excellent point, Janet. There are all kinds of supposed plans of salvation taught by men, but only one from God. Let's look at your answers to the questions about your obedience to the gospel. Do they match what Peter taught?

Chad: No.

Janet: Neither do mine. Does it matter?

Teacher: Let's look at the next few Scriptures and see if you can find an answer. ❖