

The Great Conspiracy



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

The Great Conspiracy

Learn how Satan is actively using what is called "Christianity" to deceive millions of people and cause these souls to be lost

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Great Conspiracy:

Lesson 1

What if I told you that Jesus Christ said there was something that you must “beware”? Would you be interested? Would I have your attention?

The word “beware” is a word of warning – telling you that there is something you must be aware of and exercise extreme caution regarding. You must exercise this kind of caution and awareness because of the danger that it poses. Specifically, Jesus wants you to be aware of and exercise extreme caution regarding a group of people who are extremely dangerous. He identifies these individuals as “false prophets” (false religious teachers) in Matthew 7:15. He said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

Yes, Satan is using people with messages about God, Jesus, and the Bible to accomplish evil purposes! This is why Jesus identifies this clear and present danger. Take a moment to consider the fact that there are thousands upon thousands of different (so-called) “Christian” churches that all believe, teach, and practice their faiths differently from one another.

Yet, if there is only one Bible and if the Bible contains the perfect word of God, why are there so many different “Christian” churches that believe, teach, and practice their faiths substantively different from one another? Why isn't there just one faith (one system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is acceptable to God) that is revealed in the pages of God's perfect word? Why isn't there just one church that is united in following that one message?

Historically speaking, there used to be only one faith and one church. When Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, he wrote that there was only “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). He also said that there was

only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4). Since the body is the church (see Ephesians 1:22-23), there is only one church. In fact, Jesus only ever promised to establish one church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised, “I will build My church.”

However, both Jesus and the apostles warned about those who would pervert this one faith. Jesus warned about the work of false prophets (Matthew 7:15-20). The apostle Paul warned that a time would come when individuals would “depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...” (1 Timothy 4:1). As time progressed and as people departed from the one faith, new beliefs were introduced and new “churches” were established.

Today, we are left with a world that is deeply divided and confused about what the Bible actually teaches and how that faith should be practiced. This is a product of Satan's great conspiracy. He has convinced many to depart from the one faith and they (together) are working to deceive millions of religious people today! By working in this way, he can keep many people enslaved to sin – while they think that have found Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of their sins. Therefore, many of these individuals are not looking to escape their sins – because they don't believe they are still lost in their sins!

The purpose of these lessons is to present the Bible's teachings concerning the work of Satan, his work through false religious teachers, and some of the common false teachings Satan has used to deceive millions. As we prepare to study these lessons, please allow your mind to be open to what God's word teaches – and make the proper applications of these truths. You have a choice to make as we study these lessons. Will you allow your soul to be another trophy on Satan's victory shelf? Or, will you find and follow the truth that will set you free through Jesus Christ? Jesus said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Satan, The Father Of All Lies

Though we have not been given the answers to all of the questions we have about Satan, God has told us enough about Satan to know that he is the enemy of mankind. The Scriptures also help us to understand that Satan has exercised his own free will to rebel against God and become the enemy of God. 1 John 3:8, for instance, says that “the devil has sinned from the beginning.”

Satan’s objective

Satan has a very definite mission – as evident throughout the pages of Scripture (from the very first time he is introduced to us in Genesis 3). Genesis 3:1 says (as Satan had taken the form of a serpent on this occasion), “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden”?’”

After the woman (Eve) informed Satan about the law God had given them (the law *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), Satan responded, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5). It was at this point of deception that the woman now looked at the tree differently (in a more favorable way). Satan had directly conflicted the truth that God had revealed – and had made rejecting God look very appealing. Consequently, verse 6 says, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Satan’s objective can already been seen as working against God by trying to lure someone away from listening to and obeying God. Today, thousands of years after this event in the Garden of Eden, Satan’s objective has not changed. Consider the language of 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” He is

still prowling like a lion who is seeking to destroy his prey – and has his sights set on you!

Satan is a liar

Satan has many different weapons in his arsenal that he uses against you. For instance, Ephesians 6:11 makes reference to the need to be clothed with spiritual armor that God has provided in order that you can overcome “the wiles of the devil” (the tactics and schemes of the devil). Later, in verse 16, Paul makes reference to the “fiery darts” Satan hurls at us (figuratively speaking).

However, while there is a great deal that we could discuss relative to the way in which Satan tries to accomplish his objective, the central component of it all is his lies and deceptions! Remember, this is the primary way he lured Eve away from obeying God’s law. Satan directly contradicted what God had said (when Satan said, “You will not surely die”). Then, he continued to deceptively paint the rebellion against God as a pleasurable and beneficial thing!

Jesus teaches us the same thing about Satan in John 8:44. “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

Therefore, no matter what Satan says and whatever he is involved in, you need to know that it is not based in the complete truth. Then, since it is not based in the complete truth, you need to know that it is incapable of setting you free from your sin. Remember, Jesus said that it is the truth that will set you free from sin (John 8:32)! Following the deceptions of Satan will keep you enslaved to your sins – which is exactly what he is desiring to do.

Satan authors and promotes religious lies

Certainly, Satan will utilize every weapon in his arsenal to keep people from finding the way of truth. He wants you to believe his lies about finding physical happiness through worldly possessions, wealth, pleasure, etc. He wants you to be focused on your own desires and not give any consideration to God or spiritual things. However, he also recognizes

that some people will choose to believe in God - despite his best efforts. Does this mean that he will give up from trying to capture their souls? Absolutely not! He has many deceptive tactics that capture many religious people - while they believe that they are "Christians."

So, what are these religious lies Satan perpetuates to capture those who choose to believe in God? How could Satan possibly operate in the realm of "Christianity" so that he will deceive millions of people who sit in "churches" every Sunday? This is the focus of this study. We will be exploring some of the popular lies Satan tells religious people every day (and how he uses religious people to spread his lies) - all in the "name of Jesus Christ!"

First, let's observe how Satan has spread religious lies in the past. For this, just go back to Genesis 3. Consider verses 1-6 again. Adam and Eve believed in God. They had talked with Him. There was no convincing Adam and Eve that God did not really exist. But, that did not mean Satan was out of ways to lure them away from God. Rather, he chose to spread a lie about God's motivation and about what God had actually said. Satan wanted Eve to believe that God simply wanted to hold them back from becoming like God in knowing good and evil. In fact, according to Satan, God was lying when He said that they would die for eating the forbidden fruit! These lies, from the beginning, demonstrate how Satan uses lies about God and God's word to pull people away from God!

In addition, whenever Jesus Christ lived on the earth, Satan tempted Him. Matthew 4:1-11 is one example of when this occurred. Particularly, I want you to think about the temptation that is recorded in Matthew 4:5-7. "Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: "He shall give His angels charge over you," and, "In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

What is Satan doing here? He is quoting Scripture! He is drawing a false conclusion from an Old Testament passage (Psalm 91:11-12) by twisting

its meaning and application. Now, think about the significance of Satan's ability to even use the Scriptures to tempt the Lord Jesus Christ! However, unlike Eve, Jesus overcame the devil's temptation by knowing and applying the true teachings of the Scriptures! Still, this teaches us a great lesson about how Satan even knows the Scriptures and can manipulate them to accomplish his purposes.

Now, as you think about what all of this means, hear the words of the apostle Paul concerning the work of Satan to deceive in the name of "Christianity" and "righteousness." "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves in ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Satan has worked to create religious error

Does Satan ever transform himself into an "angel of light" today in order to accomplish his purposes? Does he ever use religion (and even "Christianity") for his purposes? Absolutely!

Again, I want you to consider the teachings of the Bible in contrast with the state of the world today. We have already seen that God only revealed one faith and only established one church (Ephesians 4:4-6). Furthermore, we can observe that God wanted for all His people to be united in that one faith (see John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27). Yet, there are tens of thousands of different "Christian" churches and faiths today.

Where did they all come from? Did they all originate with God? Clearly, they did not. He did not charter their existence. He only gave one faith and established one church. He is "not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Then, since they did not originate with God, you need to understand their danger. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord build the house, They labor in vain who build it...." In Matthew 15:13, Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted."

How, then, did all of these “Christian” churches and faiths come into being – if not by God? Remember, in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Paul said that there would be a departing from the faith (apostasy) that would take place. This apostasy has happened – and continues to happen. Satan (the father of all lies – even religious lies) has been working fervently in this world to deceive the hearts of many.

As he works to deceive, Satan employs many people to help him accomplish his great deception. Consider three examples as proof. Now, as you consider these three passages, understand that they do not mean that Satan takes control of people in order to accomplish his purposes. Rather, Satan simply uses them to accomplish his purposes by deceiving them and using them to deceive others.

(1) In Matthew 16:21-23, Jesus began to show His disciples that He would “go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’” Jesus recognized that Satan was tempting him through Peter. Satan wanted Jesus to rebel against fulfilling the will of the Father. Therefore, recognize that Satan used one of Jesus’ own apostles against Jesus!

(2) Luke 22:3-6 says that “Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.” Once again, Satan used an apostle against Jesus. Satan had successfully influenced Judas to conspire with the Jewish leaders and deliver Jesus to them.

(3) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 makes reference to the apostasy (the falling away from the one faith) that would take place. As Paul makes reference to this, he speaks concerning a “man of sin” (or, “son of perdition”) who would be revealed. Though Paul

does not specifically identify who this man was, he would be involved in the apostasy. Then, please notice that the “coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (verses 9-10).

Therefore, as you consider these examples, please understand that Satan not only has worked to bring about the great apostasy that has already occurred; but He continues to work (and work through people) to lure people away from God.

The Dangerous Reality Of False Teachers

As you consider how Satan conspires to accomplish his purposes through “Christianity,” you need to consider the Bible’s teachings about false prophets and false teachers. Satan is actively using these individuals to deceive people who are interested in following Jesus Christ! Remember, these are the people Jesus Christ said you must “beware” (Matthew 7:15). Therefore, consider how the Bible answers some very important questions about false religious teachers.

Who are they?

A prophet was an individual who revealed God’s will to others. Many times, this involved the foretelling of future events (as God would reveal them to the prophets beforehand). Other times, the prophet’s work was to teach others the will of God and warn them about the consequences of violating God’s law and encourage repentance. Generally speaking, the prophet took God’s message to the people – regardless of what the specific message was.

A false prophet was an individual who claimed to speak God’s message; but, who actually spoke on his own behalf. Ezekiel 13 records an example of the kind of deceptive work accomplished by false prophets. Specifically, in this text, God

instructs the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy against the false prophets.

Look at verses 3-7: “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord. They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, “Thus says the Lord!” But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, “The Lord says,” but I have not spoken.’”

Instead of speaking the things that were truly from God, God says that they had “spoken nonsense and envisioned lies,” says that He is against them, and says that his hand would be “against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies” (Ezekiel 13:8-9). God said that they had “seduced” His people, making His people believe that there would be peace and safety – when they should have been preparing themselves for the attack of the enemy (Ezekiel 13:10). Therefore, not only would God be against those who seduced His people; but, those who listened to their false words would also experience destruction!

Today, false teachers accomplish the same sort of work that false prophets were engaged in. They speak a message that they claim originates with God; but, one that actually originates with men! Notice the connection between false prophets and false teachers in 2 Peter 2:1. “But there were false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you....”

Do they exist today?

Throughout history, there have been deceitful individuals who have claimed to speak a message from God that does not actually originate with Him. As you study the Scriptures, you should observe the fact that there are numerous references and warnings about false religious teachers in both the old and the new testaments. There is absolutely no indication in the Scriptures that this kind of deception would stop. In fact, passages like 1 Timothy 4:1-3 (as considered

earlier) indicate that it would continue – as it points to the apostasy that would take place.

Consider Galatians 1:6-9. As Paul wrote to those who had become Christians, he indicates that they had been influenced to leave Jesus Christ by those who had perverted (manipulated) the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Revelation 22:18-19 demonstrates that God does not approve of *any* kind of manipulation of the Scriptures – either by adding to or taking away from them. Now, ask yourself, “Does anyone change the teachings of God’s word today either by adding to what God has said or by taking away from it?”

Certainly, there are many examples of false religious teachings in the world today (even in “Christianity”)! Remember, God only revealed one message that contains one faith and He established only one church. However, there are tens of thousands of different ways the “Christian” faith is expressed today and tens of thousands of different “Christian” churches. This warning about false teachers, then, must be taken as seriously as ever. Consider some additional passages from the New Testament which demonstrate the reality of false teachers today.

In Acts 20:28-31, Paul encouraged the elders of the Ephesian church to “take heed” to themselves and to the flock (the church of God) because he realized that after his departure, “savage wolves” would come in among them and would not spare the flock. Also, he said, men would rise up from among themselves “speaking perverse things” (twisted things) that would “draw away the disciples after themselves.”

In Romans 16:17-18, Paul told the Roman Christians, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the

doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Then, consider 2 Peter 2:1-3. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”

Every one of these passages (as well as some others) demonstrate that there is a continual need to “beware” of those who speak false religious messages – just as Jesus said in Matthew 7:15!

Why do they exist?

Ultimately, as we have already discussed, these false religious teachers spread false messages (while claiming to speak messages of truth) because they have been influenced by Satan. Remember, he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He spreads many different types of lies in order to lure people away from following the Lord, including religious lies (go back and review Genesis 3:1-6, Matthew 4:5-7, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). These religious lies entrap individuals who desire a form of religion and godliness; but, who are not diligent in searching out the way of truth. Therefore, as you consider why there are false religious teachers in this world, you can know that this is all a work of the father of lies! Satan is behind their false claims.

Then, I want you to consider two reasons why Satan is able to find individuals who will conspire with him to spread his religious lies. (1) Some false teachers are motivated by selfish desires. Go back and look at the passages we’ve just been considering. Acts 20:29-30 says that there would be some who were desiring to draw a following for themselves. Romans 16:17-18 says that some individuals work contrary to the doctrine of Christ because they serve their own desires (i.e. their own bellies). For this

reason, the passage says they deceive the hearts of the simple. Then, 2 Peter 2 describes the work of false teachers who exploit others because of covetousness and look to gratify their own desires. Certainly, there are many who continue to be motivated by their own selfish desires (i.e. for wealth, fame, etc.) and preach false doctrines to accomplish their goals.

(2) Some false teachers have been deceived themselves. Not all false teachers have sinister motives. In fact, I believe that a very large percentage of false teachers are good and sincere people who have been deceived themselves. These individuals may be sincere – and may not have any ill-intent in their hearts that cause their false teaching (unlike the ones described previously). In fact, these individuals may even sacrifice themselves in order to accomplish the “good” they believe they are accomplishing. Even still, an individual’s good motives does not make false teaching any less harmful to himself or to others! These individuals need to be diligent to accurately interpret God’s word so that they can escape the religious error they are in – and so that they can help others do the same.

Why are they so dangerous?

False religious teachers are extremely dangerous. Consider three reasons why they are dangerous.

(1) They are deceptive. It is only fitting that those who are being used by Satan would be deceptive. Therefore, these false teachers are deceptive both in their appearance and in their persuasiveness.

They are deceptive in their appearance because they do not come advertising themselves as being false teachers. In fact, Jesus warns of them coming in sheep’s clothing, while they are actually ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15). Similarly, Peter also warns that these individuals will “secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). So, you can conclude that these false teachers are *not* going to identify themselves as false teachers. Rather, they will almost certainly identify themselves as teachers of God’s word. Furthermore, they are also (typically) going to “look the part” of what you think a true

Bible teacher should look like. Perhaps they will carry a Bible, wear a cross, or some other kind of clothing that appears “religious.” Then, they are likely going to “talk the language” you think Bible teachers will talk. You’ll likely hear them talk of salvation through Jesus, quote Bible verses, etc.

However, their deceptiveness is not *only* in their appearance. But, their deceptiveness is also in their persuasiveness. They often have a message that is more appealing than the truth. For instance, in Ezekiel 13 (referenced earlier), the Israelites would certainly rather have heard a message of peace instead of a message of impending destruction. However, the true message they needed to hear was the message warning about impending destruction. Yet, they were receiving and following the more appealing message of peace. Today, there are many people who reject the true message of the gospel because of its requirements. But, they still want a form of religion. So, they find someone who will promise them the same things promised by the gospel, but not teach the requirements as strict. However, true gospel preachers will refuse to change the message based on whether it is being well received or not!

An example of this can be seen in 2 Timothy 4:2-4. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

Sometimes, the persuasiveness of these false teachers is in the deceptive ways their messages are presented. Recall that Romans 16:17-18 speaks of some who were not focused on serving Jesus (who were only interested in serving their own desires), so they were using “smooth words and flattering speech” to “deceive the hearts of the simple.” 2 Peter 3:16 also describes a situation in which some were twisting (manipulating) what the Scriptures say. Similarly, false teachers are often guilty of speaking messages and teaching doctrines that may sound Biblical on the surface, but are really based on perversions to the Bible text (i.e. taking a passage out

of its original context). Or, they may teach things that are based only on applying part of what the Bible says about a particular subject. Or, they may teach messages and doctrines that make an individual feel good about himself/herself – regardless of whether that individual is actually right with God.

(2) They lead others into error. False teaching is deadly to the soul! Recall that 2 Peter 2:1-3 warned that these false teachers would secretly promote “destructive heresies,” bring on themselves “swift destruction,” and many would “follow their destructive ways.”

Now, what is the outcome if an individual is deceived into following a way of error rather than the way of truth? Remember, John 8:32 teaches that it is the one who knows (and follows) the way of truth who will be set free from sin. By implication, then, the one who does not come to a knowledge of the truth cannot take the appropriate actions to be set free from sin. That individual, then, will be lost in his/her sin. Consider what 2 John 1:9-11 says about the importance of abiding in the doctrine of Christ: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Therefore, many are being led to eternal destruction – and don’t know it! They think they are being led down the right path. They think they are Christians. They think they are doing what God wants them to do. However, they are being deceived.

In fact, the Bible teaches us that not all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord will be saved. Consider Matthew 7:21-23 very, very seriously. “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!’”

Notice that these words come immediately after Jesus’ warning about false prophets (in verses

15-20). Clearly, Jesus warns that there would be those who professed to follow Him and had even been involved in many good things. However, they would be condemned to eternal punishment rather than rewarded in the way they had anticipated. This was because they were not living according to the will of the Heavenly Father! Perhaps they had even been influenced by some false religious teachers in their lives.

(3) They cause the way of truth to be blasphemed. Not only are false teachers dangerous because they are deceptive and because they lead others into error; but, they are dangerous because they cause the way of truth to be blasphemed. 2 Peter 2:2 (again) says, “And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

What does it mean for the way of truth to be blasphemed? It will be spoken of in evil ways and negatively portrayed. So, not only do false teachers deceive people with their own false doctrines; but, they also deceive others about the truth of the gospel! Therefore, this develops negative attitudes toward those who actually teach and follow the message of truth!

But, why would anyone blaspheme the truth? For false teachers, the truth threatens what they believe and what they hope to accomplish. Furthermore, if people will believe the truth, they will be exposed as false teachers and lose some of their followers. Therefore, as individuals accept the truth, it will cost the false teacher in numbers, financially, in prestige, etc.

The bottom line is that you can absolutely know false teachers will not help you make it to Heaven. They will use their abilities to deceive you, cause you to follow lies, and cause you to despise the truth. Therefore, you need to heed Jesus’ words in Matthew 15:13-14. “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

How can you identify them?

Since false teachers are destructive, I hope that you have the desire to identify and disassociate

yourself from them. After all, Romans 16:17-18 instructs that you “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” – because they serve their own desires and are seeking to deceive the hearts of the simple. Fortunately, you are not helpless to know who is and who is not a false teacher. You **can** identify them!

(1) You can know them by their fruits. Perhaps you are thinking that God should not hold you responsible if you follow false teaching because someone else has deceived you. However, Jesus gives you the responsibility to test everyone who teaches you in order to see whether the message is truth or not.

Look at Matthew 7:15-20. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

Jesus said that knowing whether someone is teaching you the true words of God is much like knowing the difference between bushes. You have to examine what each one produces! You can know what kind of a tree or bush something is by examining the fruit that it produces. And, you can know whether a teacher is true or false by comparing his/her teachings with the teachings of truth (by using the standard of the Bible).

(2) You must be a truth-seeker. You can find great comfort in the fact that God has made His word available to you so that you can evaluate whether someone is a false teacher or a teacher of the truth. However, with this great blessing is also great responsibility. You must be actively and diligently searching for the truth! Again, look at Romans 16:17-18 and observe the fact that false teachers are successful in deceiving the “hearts of the simple.” Therefore, you must choose not to remain “simple” or unlearned in the Bible! Instead, you must choose

to search the Scriptures diligently so that you can know whether you are being taught the truth or error.

Acts 17:11 records an example of this. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” These Bereans desired to know the truth so much that they did not just accept anything as truth. Instead, they searched the Scriptures in order to see whether they were being taught the truth or not. Certainly, you should imitate this example and search the Scriptures so that you will know what is truth. You must not just take the things people tell you to be truth (not even the things I say). Go back and consider Galatians 1:6-9 to see that even the apostles or an angel from Heaven should not be believed if they say something that is contrary to the truth! However, you will not know whether you are being taught the truth or whether you are being taught error if you are not diligently studying your Bible! Your motivation must simply be to know the truth so that you can be set free from your sins.

Conclusion

Are you treating Jesus’ warning in Matthew 7:15 seriously? Are you exercising extreme caution regarding those who are false religious teachers? Are you being diligent to examine what you are being taught according to the teachings of the Bible? Or, have you been deceived?

Have you considered the possibility that you have been deceived (that you have believed a lie)? Perhaps you are religious. Perhaps you consider yourself to be a Christian. Perhaps you know the Bible pretty well. Still, it is possible that you have believed a lie. Please open your heart and your mind to that possibility. Always be evaluating what you believe and practice in the name of Christianity – evaluating it by God’s word. Always be a truth-seeker and be willing to make whatever changes God requires you to make in your life.

Study Questions

What does the word “beware” mean?

Why is religious division present in the world today?

1. Satan, The Father Of All Lies

What is Satan’s objective?

What is Satan’s main weapon?

Does Satan promote religious lies?

How has Satan worked to create religious error?

2. The Dangerous Reality Of False Teachers

Who are they?

Do they exist today?

Why do they exist?

Why are they so dangerous?

How can you identify them?

The Great Conspiracy:

Lesson 2

Satan is conspiring with false religious teachers to use “Christianity” to accomplish his purposes. In doing so, he has successfully deceived millions who thought they were “Christians” and thought they were following the Lord.

Fortunately, Jesus not only has warned you about the reality of this great conspiracy; but, He has told you how you can not succumb to this deception! Look again at Matthew 7:15-20. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

What if you have believed a lie? What if you have fallen victim to this great conspiracy and do not know it? Would you (upon learning the truth that God's word teaches) be willing to forsake the ways of religious error and stand in the truth – no matter what the consequences of standing in the truth were?

In this second lesson, I want to examine some of the common lies that false teachers are promoting in this world and examine each of them by the true teachings of God's word. While the things we will discuss will not (by any means) be an exhaustive list of false teachings, we will be evaluating some of the most common lies that are told – that affect a great number of people. However, I also want you to learn how we need to be evaluating everything we are taught by the standard of God's word (even as I want you to evaluate what I am teaching you by God's word).

Remember, it is only the truth that will set you free from your sins. In John 8:32, Jesus said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” You are capable of knowing the truth of God's word when you read and study it. Realize that the doctrines and traditions of men will not save you. For instance, Jesus said that some worshiped Him in vain and violated the commandment of God by holding to their own man-made religious traditions and doctrines (see Matthew 15:1-14).

Therefore, let's be very diligent in considering some of the most popular doctrines in “Christian” churches today. Let's search the Scriptures to know whether these doctrines represent the truth or whether they represent error.

False Teachings About God

One avenue false religious teachers have deceived is by teaching false doctrines about God. Consider two prominent false teachings about God with me.

“God is a loving God who will not condemn anyone to Hell”

There are many who believe and teach that God's nature of love will prohibit Him from condemning anyone to Hell. Or, even if some teach that God will condemn *some* people to Hell, they often believe that Hell is reserved for the very worst of sinners (i.e. murderers, rapists, etc.). However, let's evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, there can be no doubt that God is a loving God. 1 John 4:8 simply says that “God is love.” John 3:16 explains that God loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ) to die for the sins of the world – so that those who would believe in Him would not perish in Hell because of their sins, but have everlasting life in Heaven. Furthermore, we discover (from passages like Ephesians 2:1-10) that God is rich in grace and mercy. That is, He will provide salvation and forgiveness to those who do not deserve it. Salvation

truly is the gift of a loving God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23)!

Second, the Bible also teaches that God is a severe God who will punish those who sin against Him. God's nature is not *only* love, grace, and mercy. Instead, Romans 11:22 tells us to "consider the goodness and severity of God"! This God who is full of love is also described by the New Testament as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). And, God's book teaches us that it is a "fearful [terrifying] thing to fall into the hands of the living God" because of His vengeance (Hebrews 10:30-31). You see, though God gives all people the opportunity to be saved from their sins and experience His goodness, God also promises to punish those who disobey Him. In fact, God's holiness requires that He punish those who die in their sins. Therefore, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 promises that vengeance will be taken when Jesus Christ returns on those who "do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Third, Jesus taught that most people will not be saved. And, if they will not be saved, this means that they will be condemned to an eternity in Hell (since there are only two options for eternity – eternity in Heaven or eternity in Hell). In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Therefore, to claim that God's love will prevent Him from condemning anyone (or most people) to Hell is directly contrary to the teachings of God's word and Jesus Christ, Himself!

"Jesus is not God"

There are some who profess to follow God who claim that Jesus does not possess the nature of being God. This doctrine usually says that Jesus Christ was the first of God's creation. Although those who hold to this doctrine are typically viewed as being outside of "mainstream Christianity," there are still a large number of people who hold to this false

teaching (i.e. Jehovah's Witnesses). However, let's evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, the Scriptures plainly teach that Jesus is God. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Instead of translating this passage in this way, those who hold to this doctrine will pervert this text and make Jesus out to be a god rather than God. However, this is not what the passage says. This passage teaches that Jesus Christ possesses all of the characteristics of being God. And, there are many other passages that also teach that Jesus is God. For instance, Colossians 2:9 says that the "fullness of the Godhead" dwells in Jesus. Philippians 2:6 teaches that Jesus Christ was in the "form of God" and was "equal with God." Other passages could even be added to these.

Second, the Bible teaches that nothing was made without Jesus. It is common for those who do not believe that Jesus is God to cite Colossians 1:15, which references Jesus as "the firstborn over all creation." They interpret this to mean that Jesus Christ was the first of God's creations and, therefore, is not eternal in nature. However, this phrase is only being used to indicate Jesus' supremacy over creation (as explained by verse 17). In fact, Colossians 1:15-17 teaches that Jesus was *not* a created being. Verse 15 says that He "is the image of the invisible God." Then, verse 16 teaches that "by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...All things were created through Him and for Him." Similarly, John 1:3 says that "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." Now, if He is the image of God and nothing was made without Him, how could Jesus have been the first of God's creations?

Third, God called Jesus "God." While there are many people who will not call Jesus "God," God does call Jesus "God." Hebrews 1:8 says, "But to the Son He [God, the Father] says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" Therefore, you should not listen to those who refuse to call Jesus Christ "God"!

False Teachings About Salvation

One of the most common avenues false religious teachers have used to deceive is by teaching false doctrines about salvation (particularly, about what God requires people to do in order to be saved from their sins). Consider some prominent false teachings about salvation with me.

“All morally good, religious people will be saved”

It is often said that everyone who is a “good” person and those who are religious will be saved eternally. Therefore, whether or not an individual has been obedient to the instructions of the Bible are not, necessarily, important to the salvation of a soul – as long as these other criteria are met. Closely connected with this is the teaching of “live according to the direction of your own conscience.” While this sort of teaching may make folks feel good about themselves – and cause them to feel saved, this teaching is a lie that Satan and his allies have successfully employed to deceive many! Let’s evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, being a moral, good, and religious person is important. Titus 2:11 says that the “grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” Then, verse 12 says that God’s grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts – and that we “should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” So, God does expect that we live according to His standard of morals (not according to the world’s standard of morals) and that we be religious.

Second, there are Bible examples of morally good and religious people who were not saved. One example is Cornelius. Acts 10 introduces this man as “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2; also see verse 22). However, an angel of God appeared to him in a vision to give him instructions to send for the apostle Peter, who would tell Cornelius words by which he

and his household would be saved (read Acts 10-11). This good man was, therefore, not in a saved condition – despite being morally good and religious. Also, the Bible demonstrates this point through Saul (who later became known as the apostle Paul). Saul was devoutly religious as a Jew. He even was convinced in his own conscience that he needed to persecute and kill Christians in order to please God (see Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9:1-2; Acts 22:3-5; Acts 23:1; Acts 26:9-11). However, he too had to be taught what he needed to do in order to be saved and be baptized in order to have his sins washed away (see Acts 9:3-19; Acts 22:16). His religion and zeal for God was not enough to make him pleasing to God.

Third, the Bible connects obedience with salvation. Both of the previous examples (and many other Bible examples) demonstrate that these individuals could not be pleasing to God without being obedient to God. Jesus taught us the same thing in Matthew 7:21-23. In this text, Jesus says that *not* everyone who professes Him as Lord and does many good works in His name will be saved. Instead, Jesus said that it is the one who does the will of the Heavenly Father who will be saved. Therefore, it is good for you to be morally good and religious. However, you must listen to and obey what God instructs you to do for salvation. In fact, the Bible teaches that those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) – because Jesus Christ is only the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

“All you have to do is believe in Jesus”

The overwhelming majority of “Christian” churches claim that simply believing in Jesus Christ is the only thing God requires of you in order to be saved. Typically, it is believed that there are certain “core” doctrines about Jesus Christ that you must believe (i.e. His deity, virgin birth, sinless life, death, burial, resurrection, etc.). Then, when you believe in Jesus, they will often tell you to say a “Sinner’s Prayer” to ask Jesus into your heart. These individuals will usually tell you that there are no works that accompany salvation. However, let’s evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, the Bible does teach belief as being an essential part in salvation. There are many Bible passages that teach the essential nature of faith. For instance, Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Hebrews 11:6 also states that it is impossible to be saved without faith. So, the question is not about whether faith is necessary for salvation. It undoubtedly is. Rather, the question is about whether “faith only” is enough for salvation.

Second, true faith is accompanied by works of obedience. Is the faith that pleases God a faith that only mentally accepts certain facts as being true – or is it a faith that is obedient to whatever God has commanded? The Scriptures consistently teach that acceptable faith is a faith that is accompanied by works of obedience. For instance, Hebrews 11 records many examples of faith. However, you should read this chapter and observe the connection between their works and their faith. Certainly, none of them would be examples of faith without their works. Then, James 2:14-26 ought to settle this issue entirely. Three times in this passage, James states and demonstrates that “faith without works is dead.” Then, consider the language of James 2:24. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Now, please realize that these are not meritorious works (i.e. works by which we earn salvation). Meritorious works cannot save us (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Instead, these are works of obedience. These works of obedience to the instructions of God are necessary for salvation. Faith only is not enough to make us right in God’s sight (according to God’s word)!

Third, God has required more of you than just belief. Not only does the Bible directly say that “faith only” is not enough to make us right with God; but, the Bible also provides other commandments that are identified as being essential for salvation. In order for an individual to be forgiven of his/her sins, God’s word teaches that he/she must: (1) Hear God’s word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Then, after becoming a Christian, God requires that an individual be faithful and obedient to Him throughout his/her earthly life

(Revelation 2:10). Remember, Jesus taught (in Matthew 7:21-23) that it is *not* enough just to believe in and profess Him as Lord. Instead, you must be obedient to the will of the Father!

Fourth, the practice of the “Sinner’s Prayer” cannot be found in the Bible. Usually, those who believe and teach “faith only” for salvation will also teach that you must ask Jesus into your heart through prayer. However, there is no Bible passage that teaches such a practice! Yes, there are examples of sinners who pray (i.e. Saul, Cornelius). And, those who have already become Christians are taught to ask God for forgiveness whenever they sin (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:8-2:2). But, the Bible does not teach that asking Jesus into your heart through prayer has any part in becoming a Christian!

“You are once saved, always saved”

Popular doctrine says that once an individual becomes a Christian (is saved), he/she cannot fall away so as to lose his/her salvation. It is often said that the one who would fall back into sin was never really a Christian to begin with. While this is a very comforting doctrine, it is a deceitful doctrine that is promoted by Satan and his allies. Let’s evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, God requires faithfulness through the point of death for salvation. When Jesus was giving instructions to churches in the region of Asia Minor (in Revelation 2-3), He told a congregation of people who had become Christians (who were about to experience persecution) that they needed to be “faithful until death” in order to be given the “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). The implication is, that they would not be given this crown of life if they would be unfaithful to Him.

Second, the Bible gives examples of individuals who became Christians, but then sinned and lost their salvation. In fact, five of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3 were not being pleasing to God. Now, these churches were composed of individuals who had become Christians. But, they were not being faithful to God. Then, another example is given in Acts 8:12-24. This passage records the conversion of Simon (who had previously practiced sorcery). However, this passage

also records a sin that this man committed after he became a Christian. And, the apostle Peter condemned him for his sin (indicating that he would perish, vs. 20). Then, Peter told him what he needed to do in order to be saved from the sin he had just committed.

Third, sin is just as deadly after someone becomes a Christian as it is before he/she becomes a Christian. The Bible teaches that all sin is equal – and that it all results in the everlasting punishment of Hell (see Romans 6:23 and Romans 1:18-32). Now, sin does not cease to be spiritually harmful once you become a Christian. Instead, sin still separates the sinner from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and requires the sinner to find forgiveness from God (as in Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:8-2:2).

Fourth, God says that people can fall from grace. While there are many who claim that it is impossible to fall from the grace of God after you have been saved by it, God’s word directly teaches that it *is* possible to fall from His grace! For instance, the book of Galatians discusses a situation in which many who had become Christians previously were attempting to go back to the Law of Moses. In doing so, Paul told them, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). Now, they could not fall from grace unless they had once been saved by it – and they could not become estranged from Christ unless they had once been united with Him. Therefore, this one example plainly states and demonstrates that it is possible for those who become Christians to fall from God’s grace. This means that those who become Christians must be faithful throughout their earthly lives in order to be saved (Revelation 2:10).

False Teachings About Baptism

Baptism is clearly a Bible subject. In fact, most churches practice something called “baptism.” However, false religious teachers have deceived many people about the true purpose and action

involved in Bible baptism. As we will see, in perverting the Bible’s teaching on this one subject, many people have failed to do what God has required for salvation. Consider two prominent false teachings about baptism with me.

“You don’t have to be baptized to be saved”

Nearly every religious organization teaches that baptism is a good thing to do; but, that it is not necessary for salvation. Instead, they almost always teach that an individual is saved first (typically through “faith only”) – and then should be baptized later. They almost always teach that baptism is *not* necessary for the forgiveness of sins. However, let’s evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, being baptized does not earn a person’s salvation. Those who object to the necessity of baptism for salvation will typically say that baptism cannot be necessary for salvation because it is a work – and works do not save. However, remember what we’ve already considered in this lesson. Yes, it is true that we cannot do anything to *earn* (merit) salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, we must do the works God tells us to do in order to obey Him (James 2:24). Therefore, baptism is *not* a work that is done in order to merit salvation. Instead, it is a work that is done in order to be obedient to God’s requirements for salvation.

Second, God says that baptism is necessary for salvation. Everything that God says is necessary for salvation is necessary for salvation. As stated earlier, this includes hearing God’s word (Romans 10:17), belief (John 8:24), repentance (Acts 17:30), and confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10). And, this also includes baptism. For instance, Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Also, 1 Peter 3:20-21 says that baptism “now saves us” – just as Noah and his family were saved through water! God says that you cannot be saved until you have believed *and* been baptized!

Third, God says that baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Sin cannot be forgiven until everything God says is necessary for forgiveness has been done. Specifically, consider that God has given

baptism as a requirement for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Furthermore, Saul was instructed, “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). Now, consider this: How can you have your sins washed away and be forgiven unless you have been obedient to God’s command to be baptized? You simply cannot be!

Fourth, God says that baptism is necessary to come to Jesus Christ. According to 2 Timothy 2:10, salvation is “in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Therefore, you must be “in Christ” (in His church) in order to be saved. Galatians 3:26-27 explains that baptism is necessary for this. “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.” Only as many of them as were baptized into Christ had put on Christ. No more, no less. The same thing is true today. You cannot be in Christ (where salvation is) until you are baptized into Christ and receive the forgiveness of your sins. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that we are all “baptized into one body” (i.e. into one church). Therefore, if you want to be saved, you must be baptized!

“Sprinkling and pouring are acceptable modes of baptism”

There are many religious organizations and teachers who claim that the action of Bible baptism can be rightly accomplished through having water sprinkled or poured on an individual’s head. They often claim that the method of baptism is not important to God and that it is up to each individual to decide how he/she desires to be baptized. However, let’s evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, the Greek word for baptism means immersion or overwhelming. Now, the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. And, whenever you look up the meaning of the original Greek word used for “baptism,” credible scholars will always define the action involved as immersion, dipping, submersion,

overwhelming, etc. Therefore, if you had lived during the time the New Testament was being written, you would have understood the instruction to be baptized as an instruction to be immersed. The actions of sprinkling and pouring were not involved in this word whatsoever. In fact, there were other Greek words that were used to designate these actions.

Second, Bible examples of baptism demonstrate that it is an immersion in water. Even if you did not know anything about the meaning of the Greek word for baptism, you could know that it was accomplished by being immersed in water because of the examples given in the Bible. For instance, whenever Jesus had been baptized, He “came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16). Then, whenever the man of Ethiopia was baptized, the Scriptures teach that he “went down into the water,” was baptized, and then “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-39). What pictures do these passages paint? Do they paint pictures of immersion, sprinkling, or pouring? Clearly, they are pictures of immersion. In fact, there is no Bible example of sprinkling or pouring for the action of baptism.

Third, the Bible calls baptism a burial. Romans 6:3-4 compares becoming a Christian with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just like Jesus died, was buried, and then rose from the dead, we must die to sin, be “buried” with Jesus “through baptism,” and be raised to walk in newness of life. Similarly, Colossians 2:12 says that we are “buried” with Jesus in baptism. Now, what is the action of a burial? Is it accomplished by sprinkling or pouring dirt over a dead body? Certainly not! It is a complete covering. Therefore, baptism is also a complete covering (a complete covering of water).

Fourth, anything other than immersion in water does not accomplish what God commands. Since immersion is the true meaning and application of God’s command to be baptized, anything other than full immersion is not sufficient to accomplish baptism. Therefore, without being immersed in water, an individual does *not* receive the blessings that come from being baptized (as we saw earlier – salvation, forgiveness, and being in Christ).

False Teachings About The Church

A final point of false teaching we will consider in this lesson concerns the church. Not only has the false teachings of individuals led to the creation of many different churches; but, there has also been false teaching about the church. Consider some prominent false teachings about the church with me.

“Join the church of your own choice – since all roads lead to Heaven”

Many religious teachers and organizations make the claim that there are many different ways to serve God. Many also claim that the church you belong to doesn't make any difference to God (as long as it believes in Jesus). Instead, many teach that it is just a matter of personal opinion which church you should belong to. Therefore, they claim that an individual should just join the church of his/her own choice, the one that best suits that individual's needs. After all, they claim that all of these different churches are part of Christ's church and they will all lead to Heaven (though they take different routes to get there). However, let's evaluate what the Bible teaches on this matter.

First, notice that Jesus only promised to build one church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Now, how many churches did Jesus promise to establish? Only one! Therefore, Jesus was not the one who was responsible for the establishment of thousands of different churches (as there are today). Instead, as we discussed in lesson 1, this has been largely accomplished through the work of false religious teachers being influenced by the devil to deceive others. So, you must make a choice. Will you choose to be part of Jesus' one church that you can read about in the Bible (the church that will be saved), or will you choose to be part of a man-made church?

Second, notice that those who are part of this church are those who obey God's true plan of salvation. The Bible tells us how individuals join the church Jesus Christ established. And, it tells us that those who join His church are those who obey God's plan of salvation and become Christians (according to the Bible's teachings). That plan of salvation is to hear God's word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The Bible teaches that those who were obedient to these commandments were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). However, most “Christian” churches don't teach individuals to obey this plan of salvation (as we've already discussed). Therefore, those people who obey false “plans of salvation” cannot be part of Christ's church (though they may be part of a man-made church)!

Third, there is still only one church. Not only did Jesus Christ only establish one church; but, there is still only one church He has authorized to exist. Remember (as was identified in lesson 1), there is only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4). Since the body is the church (according to Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18), there is only one church! Christ still only has one church (body/collection) of saved people. Those who obey Him are part of this church and those who do not obey Him are not part of His church.

Fourth, God commands unity between those who follow Him. While there is only one church (in a universal sense), the Bible does speak of local churches. However, these local churches are *not* different denominations. Instead, these local churches are just locally organized groups of Christians (members of Christ's universal church) who are devoted to working and worshipping together in local geographic areas. Numerous Bible passages teach that God expects and demands unity among those who follow Him. Jesus prayed for unity in John 17:20-23. 1 Corinthians 1:10 speaks about the degree to which God's people must be united, saying they must be all speaking the “same thing,” that there be “no divisions” among them, and that they be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Furthermore, Philippians 1:27 says that Christians are to “stand fast in one spirit,

with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Therefore, these passages help us to understand that God does not approve of the religious division that exists among those who profess to follow Him.

“Church doctrine doesn’t matter”

One of the main reasons that many folks claim you can join the church of your own choice is that (in their view) church doctrine doesn’t matter. Again, they say that believing in Jesus is the only thing that matters. However, consider what the Bible says about the essential nature of believing and following right doctrine.

First, there is a pattern of sound words you must cling to. 2 Timothy 1:13 says, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Notice that there is a pattern. Then, notice that this pattern is one that contains sound (uncorrupt, healthy) words. This is a reference to all of God’s teachings (as recorded now in the pages of the Bible, particularly the words of the New Testament). Finally, this pattern must be firmly adhered to. That is, whatever God teaches must be believed and obeyed. Now, it is not possible for every church to be holding fast to the pattern of sound words – because many churches believe contradicting doctrines. So, you must choose a church that holds fast to the pattern of sound words.

Second, all perversions made to the gospel’s message are condemned by God. This also can be demonstrated from the fact that we must hold fast to the pattern of sound words. God does not permit any changes to be made to His teachings. In fact, Galatians 1:6-9 says that the one who preaches a different gospel besides the true gospel of Christ is to be accursed. Then, Revelation 22:18-19 teaches that nothing is to be added to or subtracted from God’s word. Therefore, a church that has added to what the Bible teaches believes and practices too much. And, a church that has subtracted from what the Bible teaches believes and practices too little. It is the church that believes and practices exactly what the Bible teaches that He approves. You need to seek to be part of a local church that believes and practices exactly what the Bible teaches!

Third, if you do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, you do not have God. Consider 2 John 1:9-11 again. “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Does doctrine matter to God? Obviously, it does. God says that a person who does not abide in His doctrine (His teaching) does not have Him. The same thing would be true about a church. If the church you join does not hold fast to the pure teachings of God’s word, you must not be part of it! This passage implies that if you join a church that is not following the teachings of God’s word, you share in the “evil deeds” of those false teachers!

Choosing New Testament Christianity

As you consider all of these lies Satan has used false religious teachers to spread – and the great damage that these lies have accomplished, you need to realize that you are not helpless in your fight against Satan! Remember, Jesus said that you can “know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). You do not have to be manipulated and misled by these false teachers. You can break free by studying the Scriptures and determining that you will only practice New Testament Christianity.

Introducing New Testament Christianity!

It is my hope that you have a burning desire within your heart to do what is right – regardless of the persecutions or afflictions it may bring! Perhaps you have looked around the religious world for the truth, but, you have found that the denominations are simply not practicing New Testament Christianity. But, what if I told you that you can be a New Testament Christian today? What if I told you that you could be part of a New Testament church today? Would you be interested?

You might wonder if that is even possible today – as we are nearly 2,000 years removed from the writing of the New Testament. However, consider a very simple illustration. In Luke 8:5-18, Jesus taught a parable about a sower who went out to sow his seed. This seed, Jesus said, is the word of God (Luke 8:11). Our hearts are represented in the parable by the different types of soils. Now, it is a fundamental law of agriculture that seed produces after its own kind (Genesis 1:11-12). Therefore, you expect to plant corn and reap corn. You would not expect to plant corn and reap tomatoes.

Now, suppose that we were to preserve corn seed planted in Tyler County, West Virginia, this spring – and plant it in Africa 2,000 years from now. If the climate and soil conditions were right, what would it produce? Quite simply, it would produce the same kind of corn which was harvested in West Virginia in the fall! In the same way, whenever the original seed of God’s word is planted in honest and good hearts in any community and in any age, it will produce Christians identical with those we read about in the New Testament!

In the same way, New Testament Christianity is dedicated to accomplishing this purpose of holding fast to the pattern of sound (uncorrupt) words contained within the message of the New Testament!

One faith and one church

We have already established that there is only one faith and one church (Ephesians 4:4-6). God’s word reveals exactly what God wants us to believe, teach to others, and practice in His name. There is nothing that we need to know that God has not revealed to us. For instance, 2 Peter 1:3 says that God’s “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.”

Therefore, if you want to believe, teach, and practice what God approves, you must believe, teach, and practice exactly what the Bible instructs. You must do everything according to Bible authority. Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Note that to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus is to do everything by His authority). If there is no Bible

authority for a teaching or a practice, determine to stay away from it! Always consider, “If I had lived during New Testament times, would I have been taught ‘this’ by the apostles? Would the apostles have taught the church to be involved in ‘this’?”

Those who are obedient to this one faith are part of Jesus’ one body (church). You must be part of this one church established by Jesus Christ in order to be saved. You do that by being obedient to His plan of salvation (as identified earlier in this lesson). Then, when you join a local church, you should join a church that believes, teaches, and practices exactly what you can read about in the pages of the New Testament!

Conclusion

False religious teaching and practices abound in the world! These lessons have attempted to expose the religious error that is common today. We have only been able to specifically discuss a very, very small percentage of religious error. My primary objective has been to expose you to the Bible’s warnings about religious error so that you can realize the dangers and evaluate everything you believe, teach, and practice – by the things that are written in the Bible.

As we close this study, I invite you to evaluate whether the things I have taught in these lessons are according to the word of God. If they are not, do not listen to me. If they are, please make the necessary applications to your life so that you can live in a way that is approved of God and be saved eternally in Heaven!

Study Questions

Would you (upon learning the truth that God’s word teaches) be willing to forsake the ways of religious error and stand in the truth – no matter what the consequences of standing in the truth were?

1. False Teachings About God

Explain why the following teachings about God are false.

A. “God is a loving God who will not condemn anyone to Hell” –

B. “Jesus is not God” –

2. False Teachings About Salvation

Explain why the following teachings about salvation are false.

A. “All morally good, religious people will be saved” –

B. “All you have to do is believe in Jesus” –

C. “You are once saved, always saved” –

3. False Teachings About Baptism

Explain why the following teachings about baptism are false.

A. “You don’t have to be baptized to be saved” –

B. “Sprinkling and pouring are acceptable modes of baptism” –

4. False Teachings About The Church

Explain why the following teachings about the church are false.

A. “Join the church of your own choice – since all roads lead to Heaven” –

B. “Church doctrine doesn’t matter” –

5. Choosing New Testament Christianity

What is New Testament Christianity?

Has God told you exactly what He wants you to believe, teach, and practice? Explain.