

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

I. The title of this series of lessons is “Thought Provoking Questions.”

A. That title really captures only half of what we hope this series of classes will encompass. In addition to “thought provoking questions” – of which there are many – we hope to provide thoughtful (and possibly provoking!) answers based on what the Bible has to say about the questions.

B. It seems that many classes these days include a lot of questions but in the end have very few answers. Perhaps you’ve noticed that when a teacher says “That’s a good question,” it is very often because he doesn’t have a good answer.

C. And sometimes there may not be a good answer because the question was not a good question.

1. C. S. Lewis: “Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask – half our great theological and metaphysical problems – are like that.”

D. This is not to say that we have all the answers to the good questions because of course we don’t.

1. “Anyone who knows all the answers most likely misunderstood the questions.”

2. But we do have a lot of experience in answering tough questions and we do promise to make every effort to search the scriptures to provide answers that are in accord with the word of God.

II. On the handout you will see a list of 11 categories of questions.

A. We will consider questions from these 11 categories over the next 11 weeks following today’s introductory class.

B. The final lesson will be an Open Forum in which we will address any questions we receive that fall outside these 11 categories.

C. Later today I will briefly describe each of these categories, discuss the questions we plan to answer, and ask you to give us any other questions that you would like us to consider. So please start thinking of additional questions.

III. How were these 11 categories and the initial questions in each selected?

A. To answer that question I need to give you a bit of personal history starting about 13 years ago.

B. In the summer of 1994, I was working as a Summer Faculty Fellow down the road at NASA. It was during that summer that I first accessed the World Wide Web, using a browser called Mosaic. By the next summer, I was back at NASA and I had my own web page.

C. The World Wide Web is so ubiquitous today it is difficult to conceive of a time when it did not exist, and yet for most of us 13 or 14 years is not that long ago. And yet when Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. ran for president they did so without web pages or blogs. When the Berlin Wall came down we watched it on TV, not on the Internet. And in those days, when people looked for answers to religious questions, they did not have Google.

D. In those days if I had been teaching this class (and, in fact, we did teach a questions and answers class at another congregation here in town in the early 80's) the notes for that class would have been given to the people in the class and likely they would have gone no further. Tomorrow the notes from this class will be available to anyone on planet Earth who owns a computer.

E. The Internet is the most cost effective means of reaching those who are seeking answers to questions about God. It is an incredibly powerful tool for personal evangelism, and yet it might be more accurately described as impersonal evangelism. People search, and people find, but unless they send you an email you may never have any personal contact.

F. Continuing the history, in 1999 I purchased the domain name, ThyWordIsTruth.com, and in 2000 I began posting materials on that site from classes that we were teaching here at Katy. Today we have 1000's of pages of class notes and 100's of hours of audio lessons from classes and sermons that have been presented here. We also have a web log (or "blog") at www.LogosBlog.com.

IV. In addition, we now have an additional feature on that web page – a forum for questions and answers.

A. As of today we (or more accurately, my questions editor and co-teacher!) have answered 106 questions submitted by readers of our website, and there are others that have been submitted but for which answers have not yet been posted.

B. For most of us, the questions we hear about the Bible come from within our own Bible classes and tend to be fairly predictable. If you want to sample the unpredictable variety do what I did – publish your email address and ask the world to send you questions. Your eyes will be opened quickly to the desire people have to know more

about the Bible, to the wide variety of opinions people have about the Bible, to the vehemence with which they will defend those opinions, to the many basic misunderstandings that people in the world have about God and about his word, and to the incredible confusion about God and God's word that Satan has sown throughout this world.

C. But the one thing that comes through with each question is that people are seeking. In fact, they are literally seeking as they go to search engines and type in their questions. We should pray each day that when people enter their questions, they will find web pages with truthful answers.

D. Certainly there are some cranks. There are people who have a willful ignorance for God's word – they do not want to know the truth. They ignore the Bible verses you send them and they send none back in response, but instead simply repeat their unsupported arguments – usually in all capital letters. Eventually you are reminded of Matthew 7:7 and Matthew 7:6.

1. If someone asked me to find the Internet in the Bible, I would take them at once to Matthew 7:7 – Seek and ye shall find!

2. But after someone sends me the 5th email berating me for proclaiming the necessity of baptism but without discussing at all what the Bible says on the subject, I think of the preceding verse in Matthew 7:6 – Cast not your pearls before swine!

3. I will discuss the subject of baptism from now to the end of time with someone who is genuinely interested in knowing the truth on that subject and who is sincerely studying the Bible to know what it says on that subject, but my patience wears thin quickly with those who simply want to defend a position without regard to whether it is supported by the Bible.

4. I do not want to lose the opportunity to talk with someone who would give anything to know the truth because I am spending time with someone who refuses to know the truth.

5. Paul described such people in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 as having “received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

E. But getting back to my point – the 11 categories on your handout came primarily from the questions we have received on the Internet.

1. Some of these questions may be your questions as well. If you have others, you will have an opportunity in just a moment to ask them. Also, you can give either us your questions at anytime and by any method throughout the quarter – all we ask is that you give us enough lead time to properly research the issue.

None of us wants a free for all in which many questions are asked but few answers are given.

2. Even if these are not your questions, you most likely know someone with these questions – perhaps your neighbor or your co-worker. Our hope is that these lessons will give you the material you need to answer those questions in a way that will invite additional questions.
3. I have taught the book of Revelation on several occasions (although never here) and each time I make the point that one of the best tools for personal evangelism is to put a commentary on Revelation out on your desk. You don't even have to open it, but people will see it and ask you questions. If they begin to trust your answers on that subject, very soon they will trust your answers on the most important subject – what they must do to be saved.
4. Philip's conversation with the Eunuch in Acts 8 provides a valuable example – Philip initiated the conversation by asking the first question, Philip knew the answers to the Eunuch's question, and Philip took the opportunity to teach him much more, and a soul was saved. How would that story have ended if Philip had responded to the Eunuch by saying "Well that certainly is a good question!" The Eunuch knew it was a good question – he wanted a good answer!
5. The materials and handouts for these lessons will be posted to the Internet each week along with an audio copy of each lesson. We hope that these materials will continue to be a useful reference for you long after this class is over.

F. Notice in my previous answer I said that these questions came "primarily" from the Internet.

1. "Primarily" is a good lawyer word. It introduces just the right amount of fuzziness while still leaving lots of wiggle room!
2. In this case, it omits a few questions that I added just because I thought they were either very interested or very timely or both.
3. Let me say a few words about the interesting questions: Even though I have seen it many times both in the church and out of the church, I am always amazed when I meet someone who finds the Bible boring.
4. We have in our hands the eternal word of the eternal God, the creator and sustainer of the Universe, the Almighty Jehovah God, the Great I Am – and some people find it boring. Incredible!
5. "The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity."
6. Now we teachers may be partly to blame. You have heard about people who talk in their sleep. A bad teacher talks in other people's sleep!

7. If we teachers act like we are bored or if we make it boring through our lack of preparation and lack of understanding, then it is no surprise if the rest of the class is bored. But we, not the Bible, are the source of that boredom. It is not the Bible's fault if we spend our time scratching in the dirt on the surface oblivious to the unfathomable riches we would find if we only picked up our shovel and dug!
8. Isn't that what David said in Psalm 119:162? "I rejoice at your word as one who finds great treasure."
9. Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.
10. John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.
11. The best teachers are always the teachers who love their subject – and that's true no matter what the subject is. One of my favorite classes in law school was Federal Income Tax, and it was only because the professor lived for and loved the tax code!

G. Before we look at the categories on the handout, I would like to spend a moment considering some pitfalls we need to avoid.

1. We must not be afraid to ask questions.
 - a) Some topics are controversial and some are emotional, but even so we should not shrink from asking the hard questions.
 - b) Thomas Paine – "It is error only, and not truth, that shrinks from inquiry."
2. We need to respond to Bible questions with Bible answers.
 - a) The responses "because I like it" or "because I've always thought it to be true" are not proper responses.
 - b) "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue, but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing." □ Mark Twain
 - c) We have one and only one authoritative source on religious issues, and we ignore that source at our eternal peril.
 - d) I receive emails every week from people who disagree with something on our website, and very often the complaints are long and scripture-free! They go on and on about why we're wrong, but they cite not one scripture in defense of their position. We must never be like that.

3. If we disagree with someone who cites a Bible verse in support of his position, we need to be prepared to explain how that verse was misapplied.
 - a) Even if we have a verse of our own, we must remember that the argument is not over until we considered the verses brought up by the other side.
 - b) The Bible is a consistent whole, and if our view on something is contradicted by even a single verse, then our view is wrong. We can't just say, "Well, I've got my verses and you have yours." We all have the same verses – and they all agree.
4. We must be careful to let the Bible determine our actions, and not let our actions determine what the Bible means.
 - a) For example, it is sometimes tempting to define sin as that which we do not do. For example, one of the questions we will consider is whether playing the stock market is gambling. One response might be to say, "Well, I play the stock market or so and so plays the stock market, and so it can't be a sin!" That reasoning of course is flawed, even though we may find that the conclusion is correct.
5. We must be careful to define our terms.
 - a) It is easy to say that gambling is wrong – it is much more difficult to define gambling.
 - b) It is easy to say that baptism is a work and therefore can't be essential to salvation (as many argue) – it is much more difficult to define work.
 - c) The worst situation is one in which a term is being discussed and everyone is using their own definition for the term because its definition was never discussed. We will get into trouble quickly if we don't define our terms.
6. We should not hesitate to consult extra-Biblical materials, while of course comparing whatever we find with the Word of God.
 - a) It is foolish to study a Biblical topic while ignoring what others have said throughout 1000's of years of history. There is no need for us to reinvent the wheel. We should consider what others have to say and then reject whatever is at odds with the Scriptures.
7. We should remember several important things about the Word of God from Paul's second letter to Timothy.

a) 2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

b) 2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

c) 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

8. And finally we should obey Peter's command:

a) 1 Peter 3:15-16 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: **and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh** you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: 16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

b) The only way we can obey that command to “be ready always to give an answer” is to study and prepare for the day when that question is asked.

c) And to prepare for answering a question about the Bible we must spend time studying the Bible. You often hear that you should not treat religion as a hobby, but what that means is that our religion should be much more than a hobby, not less than a hobby! If we are interested in our hobby and spend time and money engaged in and learning about our hobby, then we should spend more time, more energy, and more money learning about spiritual matters. I think turning our religion into our hobby would be a great start for some of us!

H. And now the categories:

1. Lesson 2: Questions About Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage (JH)

a) Of all the categories, this one receives the most questions on our website by a very wide margin. People are really struggling with these issues, and it is vital that we know what the word of God has to say on this topic – and it is equally vital that we proclaim that message even if it turns out to be unpopular.

b) The very worst thing we can do to someone is convince them they are right with God when they are not. The second worst thing we can do is say nothing.

c) May a Christian continue living in adultery after coming to Christ? Does God permit divorce in the absence of adultery? May a Christian marry a person divorced for a reason other than adultery? May a Christian remarry if the former spouse lusted for another in his or her heart?

2. Lesson 3: Questions About Baptism (EH)

a) This is the category that receives the second largest number of questions. I run Google ads for our site with a teaser regarding the necessity of baptism – and that message I have found really infuriates some of the visitors to the site. They are convinced that I am wrong, but as it usually turns out, they aren't really sure why.

b) Two recent emails disagreed with my statements that baptism is essential to salvation – one argued that it is a work and we are not saved by works, the other argued it was an act of obedience that occurred after our salvation. The world is very confused on the subject of baptism.

c) What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What about the thief on the cross? Wasn't he saved without baptism? What about Cornelius and his household? How is baptism related to circumcision under the Old Covenant? What about infant baptism? Is baptism a "work"?

d) Whenever I study infant baptism I am reminded of how the well-known atheist H.L. Mencken once responded when he was asked whether he believed in infant baptism. He said, "Believe in it? I've seen it done!"

3. Lesson 4: Questions About the Role of Women in the Church (JH)

a) This topic is very controversial in some circles, but much less so today than it once was. Not less so in the church (where it is becoming more controversial), but less so in the denominational world where the issue has been replaced by the role of homosexuals in the church. I guess that one is next for us as well if history is any guide.

b) What about women preachers? Can a woman exercise authority over a man in the secular world? If the Greek words of "wife" and "woman" are the same and the meaning is determined by context, then does this impact the permissible role of women in the church? Which is referred to in 1 Cor. 14:34? Acts 2 says "your daughters shall prophesy." Does this authorize women to preach?

4. Lesson 5: Questions About End Times (EH)

a) When I spoke earlier about adding some interesting questions all on my own, this was the area I was talking about. We get a lot of questions on the end times, but I have added a few of my own.

b) Revelation 13 and 17 talk about 7 kings followed by an 8th. Daniel 7 talks about 10 horns that are followed by a little horn. The horns in Daniel are kings, and all of these kings reign over a kingdom that is in power when Christ came into the world, which of course is the Roman empire. Why, though, does Daniel speak of 10 kings and John speak of 7 kings? Who are the 3 missing kings? Three emperors reigned between Nero and Vespasian, and they were Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Together they reigned a little over a year (AD 69) and were soon killed and replaced. It was a very tumultuous time in Rome – and one that Daniel wrote about 600 years before the fact! The Bible boring?? Hardly!

c) What are the 70 weeks in Daniel 9? What are the 10 horns in Daniel 7? What is the relation between Daniel and Revelation? Who is the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2:3? Is the war in Iraq a fulfillment of prophecy? Who is the anti-Christ? What is 666? What about Matthew 24?

5. Lesson 6: Questions About Mormonism (JH)

a) Why talk about the Mormons? There are currently 13 million Mormons, with another million added about every three years. The National Council of Churches lists the Mormon church as the fourth fastest growing church in the U.S. Mormons want nothing more than to enter the religious mainstream.

b) Is Mormonism a “Christian” religion? What do the Mormons teach about God and Christ? What do the Mormons teach about eternal life? What is baptism for the dead as taught by Mormons? Should we vote for a Mormon politician?

6. Lesson 7: Questions About Social Drinking and Gambling (EH)

a) I have a special interest in the issue of gambling. Not because I have ever gambled, but because I taught probability theory at SMU for 7 years. As I used to tell my students, your chance of winning the lottery is about the same whether or not you buy a ticket! Surely there are better things we can be doing with our money!

b) I don't have special interest in drinking, but it is a timely topic and an important topic. In a world out of which we are called to be separate and be different, this is one topic we all need to consider very carefully.

c) Does anything really happen by chance in our lives? Does God know the outcome of a coin flip before the flip? What is gambling? Am I gambling when I buy stocks? Is there anything wrong with the lottery? Isn't there a lot of social drinking in the Bible? How can it be wrong if we drink in moderation? If drinking is wrong because drunkenness is a sin, then wouldn't it follow that eating is wrong because gluttony is a sin?

7. Lesson 8: Questions About Instrumental Music in Worship (JH)

a) This issue is sometimes treated as a secondary issue, but I think we will find that it is a central issue because where we come down on this issue speaks volumes about our view of the Scriptures.

b) Has God authorized a particular type of music in worship? May a Christian listen to religious songs that are accompanied by mechanical music? Do Ephesians 5:17-20 and Colossians 3:16-17 apply to the worship service? Isn't instrumental music just a matter of choice?

8. Lesson 9: Questions About the Lord's Church (EH)

a) There is a great deal of confusion in the world about the church, and I fear some of it is making its way into the church itself. You hear a lot about "my church" and "your church" but very little about the Lord's church.

b) How does Matthew 18:15-20 apply to disputes in the church? Why do we write "church of Christ" rather than "Church of Christ"? Was the church discussed in the Old Testament? What did Jesus mean in Matthew 16 when he referred to "my church"? How are Isaiah 2, Joel 2, and Acts 2 related? Are we Protestants? Is the church a denomination?

9. Lesson 10: Questions About Evolution & Intelligent Design (JH)

a) Here is yet another timely topic that gets a lot of press these days. But the days of debates between evolutionists and creationists are long over – they have been replaced with a much more powerful weapon, ridicule. If you can't defeat them, then marginalize them. But that's hard to do when at last count 88% of Americans believe God created the world.

b) One topic we will consider is the theology of evolution, and it is a religion – it has its own dogma, its own sacred writ, its own heretics, its own burnings at the stake, and its own high priesthood.

c) What gave rise to the theory of evolution? Isn't there an abundance of scientific evidence that supports evolution? What is meant by "intelligent

design”? Is intelligent design scientific or religious? Should it be taught in our schools?

10. Lesson 11: Questions About Forgiveness and Repentance (EH)

- a) I added this topic in response to a news story I saw a few weeks ago.
- b) “Kelly White and her two children visited the semicircle of memorials on the Virginia Tech campus, leaving 32 pink tulips — one for each victim in last week's massacre. They also placed a tulip on the stone for gunman Seung-Hui Cho. “Forgiveness is part of being freed from anger,” said White, a Blacksburg resident with relatives who attended the school. “I try to teach my children that God loves everyone.”
- c) And here then is the question: Are the parents of those murdered children required to forgive their murderer?
- d) *Must we forgive others absent their repentance? Does God forgive us absent our repentance? Why did Jesus ask God to forgive those who crucified him rather than just forgive them himself? Was that prayer answered and, if so, when? What does it mean when God remembers our sins no more? What is the relation between forgiveness and love – can we have one without the other?*

11. Lesson 12: Questions About the Holy Spirit (JH)

- a) If you have noticed a pattern in which the really tough issues have been assigned to my co-teacher, let me assure you that it was just a coincidence!
- b) *What is the gift of the Holy Spirit and when is it received? How does the Holy Spirit work in today's world – miraculously or non-miraculously? Does, and if so, how does the Holy Spirit dwell in a Christian? Are we guided by the Holy Spirit today, and if so, how?*

12. Lesson 13: Open Forum