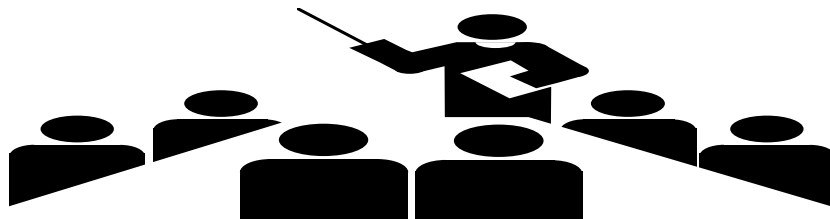


BIBLE STUDY SERIES



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The Bible in the Wesleyan Heritage

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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THE BIBLE IN THE WESLEYAN HERITAGE

Lesson # 1: The Authority and Finality of the Bible

Key Verse: 2 Timothy 3:16

PROPOSITION: The Bible is God’s living word, the ultimate source of religious knowledge, and the final authority for Christian belief and practice.

INTRODUCTION: The Three Emphases of the Wesleyan Heritage

- *Revealed Religion:* a religion based on the Bible
- *Experienced Religion:* a religion of the Bible confirmed in the heart
- *Ethical Religion:* a religion of the Bible put into action and expressing itself in responsible living in community

I. The Bible is God’s living word. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

- A. It is the living word from which we can nurture our children in the way of the Lord. (14)
- B. It is the living word that makes us *wise unto salvation*. (15)
- C. It is the living word that is inspired by God (16)
- D. It is the living word that enhances every area of our lives (16)
 - 1. It is useful for doctrine: teaching us the truth.
 - 2. It is useful for reproof: reproving our false doctrine & wrong thinking
 - 3. It is useful for correction: correcting our immorality and bad behavior
 - 4. It is useful for instruction in righteousness: training us in living right
- E. It is the living word that enables us to reach our full potential in Christ. (17)
 - 1. It enables us to grow toward maturity in Christ.
 - 2. It equips us for meaningful ministry in Christ.

II. The Bible is the ultimate source of our religious knowledge (2 Peter 1: 19-21)

- A. The Bible is above “reason”. (Is. 55: 8-9)
- B. The Bible is above “private revelations”.
- C. The Bible is above religious experience”.
- D. The Bible is above “Christian tradition”. (Mk. 7:7-9)
- E. The Bible is above “natural creation”. (Rom. 1:19—20)

III. The Bible is the final authority for our belief and practice

- A. Wesleyan Statements:
 - 1. *“I am a man of one book!”* The Bible stands alone because it alone showed him how to live on earth and how to get to heaven.
 - 2. *“For as all faith is founded upon divine authority, so there is now no divine authority but the Scriptures and therefore, no one can make that to be divine authority which is not contained in them.”*
 - 3. *“My ground is the Bible ... I follow it in all things, great and small.”*
 - 4. *“The Scriptures are a complete rule of faith and practice; they are clear in all necessary points.”*

- B. Disciplinary Statements:
 - 1. Articles of Faith
 - a. Article V – The Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation.
 - b. Article VI – Of the Old Testament
 - 2. General Rules: *Conclusion: These are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even His written Word, which is the only Rule, and a sufficient Rule, both of our faith and practice.*

IV. The Bible and its interpretation (Acts 17: 2, 3, 11; 18: 24-26)

- A. “*Quadrige*”: The fourfold Sense of Scripture
 - 1. *Literal* interpretation (literal sense)
 - 2. *Allegorical* interpretation (figurative sense)
 - 3. *Topological* interpretation (moral sense)
 - 4. *Anagogical* interpretation (spiritual sense)
- B. The Rules of Interpretation: Let the Scriptures explain themselves. (Is. 28: 9-10)
 - 1. **Text:** verse or verses which are the focus of the sermon or lesson. (Proverb 23:7)
 - 2. **Context:** verses which form the background or setting of the text (Proverb 23:1-8)
 - 3. **Greater Context:** other verses in the Bible that shed light on the subject (Mark 7:6)
- C. The keys to sound Biblical Teaching (Luke 24:27)
 - 1. Biblical teachings must be based on the Bible.
 - 2. Biblical teachings must point to Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Biblical teachings must not contradict Scripture.

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Lesson # 2: Errors to Be Avoided

Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15

PROPOSITION: Erroneous interpretations can be very harmful to our understanding of God and the Church.

- I. Austere Predestinarianism:** the erroneous view which fosters that “God chooses some people to be eternally saved and others to be eternally damned”.
- A. The Methodist position is called the “universality of salvation” and fosters that “all people are chosen by God for salvation, but in order to be saved they must respond to God’s gracious offer in Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim. 2:3-4) (Rom. 10: 10-13)
 - B. The Bible teaches that God saves all who repent and believe. (2 Peter 3: 9; Acts 17:30)
 - C. Grace is free for all and in all who believe. (2 Corinthians 5:14,15; Titus 2: 11)
 - D. Man has freedom of choice and by God’s own creative action; he is not a mere puppet. (John 2:16: Rev. 3:20; 22:17)
 - E. Salvation is something that God wants us to experience; and not to speculate about or hope for. (Mark 1:14, 15; Acts 16:30, 31)
- II. Barren Sacerdotalism:** the erroneous belief that the rituals and sacramental functions of the priesthood (communion, baptism, etc.) alone can affect the grace of God in the lives of people.
- A. The Methodist position is that “religion must be experienced in the heart” as a result of one’s faith before the sacraments and other rituals can have any real spiritual and lasting impact. (Rom. 10:8-10; John 1:12, 13).
 - B. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of those who believe which gives power and reality to rituals and sacraments. (John 1:26, 27; John 5:10-13)
- III. Mystical Nonchurchism:** the erroneous view which stresses the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit without emphasizing the “means of grace” and the “fruit of the Spirit”. It fosters separation from the community of faith.
- The Methodist position stresses that the “means of grace” are made available primarily through the church; its orderly service of worship, duly administered sacraments, regular habits of the Bible Study, directed prayer groups, carefully planned preaching, organized program of service to others and disciplined living. (Acts 2:41-47; Acts 10: 23-25)
- IV. Irresponsible Antinomianism:** the erroneous belief that “when we are under the grace of God in Christ, we are free from the requirements of the law. We are free to do as we please.
- A. The Methodist position fosters that although we are not saved by obeying the law, the Bible teaches that one of the evidences of being saved is that we obey God’s law. (1 John 2:3-6; 1 John 3:6-10)
 - B. *Good works* and a godly life are not the means of salvation, but are evidences of genuine faith and a vital relationship with Christ. (James 2:17-20)

V. Cold Intellectualism: an erroneous emphasis on intellectual understanding of truth without the heart experience of that truth.

- A. The Methodist position emphasizes that knowledge and piety must go together. The understanding of Biblical truth must be accompanied by the experience of its realities. (1Cor. 8:1-3).
- B. Sound thought is an aid to grace but not the substance of it. Our religious knowledge and Biblical understanding must not be allowed to make us cold, conceited and self-reliant. (Prov. 3:5-7; Rom. 12:3)

VI. Uncaring Institutionalism: the erroneous position which holds that the church lives in community to promote, preserve, and provide for itself.

The Methodist position fosters that the church is a community of faith in the world as a servant of God and the community; and not as an “an end in itself”. It is to care for and minister to those within the fellowship, as well as those outside itself. The church is God’s instrument to reach out to the community and the world. (Gal. 6:9, 10; Rom. 12:13) God judges people and nations on the basis of how they responded to the needs of the people around them. (Matt. 25:34-40)

VII. Narrow-minded Dogmatism: the erroneous view which forces one’s views of the Bible on others, insisting that all persons must adopt those views in order to be in favor with God.

- A. The Methodist position fosters that in all matters that do not strike at the heart of Christianity, “we think and let think”.
- B. John Wesley knew that each person must worship according to conscience; and that the Bible with its emphasis on the love of God and man, requires the “catholic spirit” toward all people, including those whose beliefs and practices are contrary to our own. (Rom. 14:1-13)
- C. He knew that the Scriptures taught against arguing over Christian beliefs; and although he could defend his own views on the Bible, he never imposed them on others. (2 Tim. 2:23-25)

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Lesson # 3: Vital Doctrines: The Trinity of God

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:2

PROPOSITION: Even though the word trinity does not appear in the Bible, the concept of the trinity of God runs through the Holy Scriptures.

I. The first appearances of the trinity of God in the Bible

- A. In the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:1, 2, 26, 27)
- B. In the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22)

II. Other passages supporting the trinity of God in creation

- A. John 1: 1-3
- B. 1 Corinthians 8:6
- C. Ephesians 3:9
- D. Colossians 1:15-17
- F. Hebrews 1:1-3

III. Other appearances of the trinity of God in the Bible

- A. At Christ's baptism (Matt 3:16, 17)
- B. In the baptismal formula given by Christ (Matt 28:19)
- C. In the promise of the Holy Spirit
 - 1. John 14:15-17
 - 2. John 15:26
 - 3. John 16:13-15
 - 4. Acts 1:4, 5, 7, 8
- D. In the plan of redemption
 - 1. Romans 5:5-8
 - 2. Galatians 4:4-7
 - 3. Ephesians 2:13, 16
 - 4. Titus 3:4-7
 - 5. 1 Peter 1:2
- E. In the Divinity of Christ
 - 1. John 1:1, 14
 - 2. John 5:17, 18, 21-23, 26, 27
 - 3. John 10:30
 - 4. John 14:6-10
 - 5. Philippians 2:6-11
 - 6. Colossians 1:15
 - 7. Colossians 2:9
 - 8. Hebrews 1:3

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Lesson # 4: Vital Doctrines: Mankind's Universal Sin and God's Preventive Grace

Key Verses: Romans 3:23; Titus 3:23

PROPOSITION: Because of our depraved nature as sinners, God's preventive grace must lead us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I. Mankind's Universal Sin: We are all sinners, born with a depraved nature that is at war with God; and are all in need of God's redeeming grace.

A. Article of Religion: VII – Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly say), but it is corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil and that continually.

B. Definitions

1. *Original Sin:* the disobedience of Adam & Eve that plunged humanity into sin and has been followed by every person (except Jesus Christ) receiving a sin nature and choosing to sin. (Romans 5:18, 19)
2. *The Fall:* the result of the first human sin, which marred the image of God in humans and created an environment for and a tendency towards sin for all people. (Romans 5:12)
3. *Depravity:* a state of sinfulness, corruption, helplessness and enmity with God, in which every human finds him or her self before salvation and redemption. (Romans 3:10-12; 5: 6-10)
4. *Actual Sins:* the sins that humans commit by thoughts, words and deeds; which are the direct result of humanity's sin nature. (Romans 3:13-18)
5. *Condemnation:* the declaration of guilt for sin which involves not only temporal punishment, but also eternal damnation [hell]. (Romans 3:19, 23; James 2:10; 2 Thessalonians. 1:7-9)
6. *Justification:* sinners may be forgiven and put right with God not through their works or goodness, but only through God's grace and their "saving faith" in Jesus Christ. (Romans 3: 20-28; Gal 3: 16; Eph. 2: 8, 9)

II. God's Preventive Grace: God's Spirit is present in each of us, enabling us to know the difference between right and wrong; and enabling us to recognize and respond to our Savior.

A. Definitions:

1. **PREVENIENT** means *going before*.
2. **GRACE** is *God's unmerited favor*.
3. **PREVENIENT GRACE** is the presence of the Holy Spirit before salvation, helping us to recognize God's call to salvation and assuring us of the opportunity to respond to God.

B. **Humanity is depraved, but not “totally” depraved.** God gives each of us enough grace to answer His call to repent and believe the gospel.

1. Jesus gives light to every person to either accept or reject. (John 1: 9; John 3: 17-19)
2. God has put His law in the hearts of people who do not even have the written law so that they are able to tell right from wrong. (Romans 2: 15)
3. It is the Holy Spirit Who convicts and convinces the world about sin, righteousness and judgment. (John 16: 7-11)
4. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him or her; and whoever comes to Christ will not be denied by Him. (John 6: 44; John 6: 37)
5. God wants everyone to repent of their sins, be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2: 3, 4; 2 Peter 3: 9)
6. The grace of God, which brings salvation, is being offered to everyone. (Titus 2: 11)

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Lesson # 5: Vital Doctrines: Justification by Faith

Key Verses: Romans 5:1, 2

PROPOSITION: Only through *saving faith* in the Lord, Jesus Christ can we be justified and placed into a right relationship with God.

I. The Necessity of Saving Faith

- A. The desire to be saved [to flee the wrath to come] is the primary condition for probationary membership in the A. M. E. Zion Church.
- B. Saving Faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ is the primary condition for full connectional membership in the A. M. E. Zion Church.
- C. Saving faith is the only means of salvation according to the Scriptures:
 - 1. Abraham was saved by faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4: 1-5)
 - 2. David was saved by faith (Romans 4: 6-8)
 - 3. Christians are saved by faith (John 1: 12; Romans 3: 20-22, 28; Ephesians 2: 8, 9; Hebrews 11: 6)

II. The Meaning of Saving Faith: *Saving faith is belief plus commitment.* It is believing enough to commit our lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

- A. It involves *believing the gospel.* (Romans 1; 14-17)
- B. It involves *believing with the heart.* (Romans 10: 8-10)
- C. It involves *confessing with the mouth.* (Romans 10:8-10)
- D. It involves *calling on the name of the Lord.* (Romans 10:13)
- E. It involves *responding to the gospel.* (Romans 10: 14-17)
- F. It involves *opening one's heart to Christ.* (Rev. 3: 20)
- G. It involves *receiving Christ as Lord and Savior.* (John 1: 12)
- H. It involves *trusting Christ "alone" for salvation.* (1 John 5: 10-13)

III. The Justification that Comes by Saving Faith

- A. Justification comes only by saving faith (Romans 3: 26, 28; Gal. 2: 15-16)
- B. To be justified is to be declared righteous. (Romans 4: 5-6)
- C. To be justified is to have all sins forgiven (Romans 4: 7-8)
- D. To be justified is to have the righteousness of Christ imputed our account. (Romans 4: 3, 6, 11)
- E. To be justified is to be received into the state of God's grace. (Romans 5: 1-2)
- F. To be justified is to be received into God's family as his child. (John 1: 12, 13; Gal. 3:26; Gal. 4:4-7)
- G. To be justified is to be delivered from condemnation and given eternal life. (John 3: 15-18; John 5: 24)

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Lesson # 6: Vital Doctrines: Regeneration

Key Verses: Titus 3:5

PROPOSITION: Through the miracle of regeneration, we experience a spiritual rebirth and become new creatures in Jesus Christ.

I. The Necessity of Regeneration

- A. It is necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God. (John 3: 3-7)
- B. It is necessary in order to understand spiritual things. (1Corinthians 2:14)
- C. It is necessary in order to receive spiritual gifts. (1 Corinthians 12: 7; Ephesians 4: 7-8)

II. The Meaning of Regeneration

- A. It is experiencing *a new birth*. (John 3: 3-7)
- B. It is receiving *a new heart*. (Ezekiel 36: 25-26)
- C. It is receiving a new Spirit, the Spirit of God. (Ezekiel 36: 26-27)
- D. It is receiving *a new nature*; the nature of God. (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John. 3: 9)
- E. It is receiving a new love, the love of God. (Romans 5: 5; 1 John 3:14; 4:7, 8)

III. The Process of Regeneration

- A. It begins with spiritual conception
 - 1. The conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16: 8-9)
 - 2. The appetite for the truth about salvation and righteousness. (Matt. 5:6)
 - 3. The fruit of genuine repentance evidenced (Matthew 3: 8)
- B. It results in a new birth as real as that of physical birth
 - 1. The Holy Spirit is the Agent (John 3: 8)
 - 2. The Word of God is the instrument (James 1: 18; 1 Peter 1: 23)
- C. It is made possible by the grace of God. (Titus 2:11; 3:4, 5)
- D. It is experienced only by those who exercise *saving faith*. (Eph. 2: 8-9)
- E. It is evidenced by a life of *good works*. (Ephesians 2: 10; James 2:14-26)

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Lesson # 7: Vital Doctrines: The Witness of the Spirit

Key Verses: Romans 8:16

PROPOSITION: The witness of the Spirit is God's plan for giving us the assurance of salvation.

DEFINITION: "The witness of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I even I, am reconciled to God".

John Wesley

I. The Importance of Assurance

- A. It gives the believer boldness in sharing his/her faith.
- B. It gives the believer a positive motive for holiness, service, worship and praise.
- C. It gives the believer new meaning in life, service and worship.
- D. It gives the believer a new view of death and eternity; and thus new values for life in the now.

II. The meaning of Assurance

- A. It is an impression on the soul (1John 5: 10)
- B. It is the Holy Spirit witnessing to our spirit that we are God's children. (1 John 5: 6-10; Romans 8: 16)
- C. It is the Holy Spirit in our hearts assuring us that our sins have been forgiven and atoned for by the death of Christ; and that we are thus heirs of salvation. (Galatians 4: 4-7)
- D. It is the Holy Spirit assuring us that we are in Christ and that God loves us and gave His Son for us. (1 John 4: 10-13)
- E. It is the Holy Spirit assuring us that we have eternal life. (1John 5: 10-13)

III. The Process of Assurance

- A. We know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit has imparted spiritual life into us. (1Corinthians 2:14; Eph. 2: 1-5; Matt. 13: 16-18)
- B. We know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit has given us a new desire and ability to keep God's commandments and do God's will. (1 John 2:3-6)
- C. We know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit has given us God's love. (Romans 5:5; 1 John 3:14)
- D. We know that we are saved because the Holy Spirit has given us His indwelling presence. (Romans 8: 9; 1 John 3: 24)

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Lesson # 7: Vital Doctrines: Sanctification

Key Verses: 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4

PROPOSITION: Sanctification is that work of God's grace by which we are renewed after the image of God; set apart for His service; and enabled to die to sin and live unto righteousness.

I. The Nature of Sanctification [What is it?]

- A. It is the work of God's grace through which He imparts in us both *the desire and the ability to do His good pleasure*. (Philippians 2:12, 13)
- B. It is the process of character development through which we are being *renewed after the image of Christ*. (Colossians 3: 10)
- C. It is the process of life transformation through which we are *dying unto sin and living unto righteousness*. (Romans 6: 10-13)
- D. It is the process of growing usefulness to the kingdom of God through which we are *set apart unto God*. (2 Timothy 2:19-21)
- E. It is the process of maturing love through which we learn to grow in social as well as personal holiness. (1 Thessalonians 3: 12-13)

II. The Importance of Sanctification [Why is it necessary?]

- A. It is God's will for the Christian. (1Thessalonians 4: 3-4)
- B. It is God's purpose in redeeming us (Titus 2: 11-14)
- C. It is God's command to His people (Peter 1: 15-16)
- D. It is God's way of being glorified (Matthew 5:16; John 15:8)
- E. It is God's requirement for seeing Him (Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14)

III. The Means of Sanctification [How is it achieved?]

- A. The Human Side: *CONSECRATION* (Romans 12: 1, 2)
 - 1. Fleeing evil and following righteousness (2 Timothy 2:22)
 - 2. Taking off the *old man* and putting on the *new man* (Ephesians 4: 22-24)
 - 3. Denying ungodliness and living righteously (Titus 2: 12)
 - 4. Attending the means of grace (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10: 25)
 - 5. Working "out" our own salvation (Philippians 2: 12b)
- B. The Divine Side: *SANCTIFICATION* (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
 - 1. The blood of Christ, the source of our sanctification (Hebrews 10:10; 13:12)
 - 2. The word of Christ, the instrument of our sanctification (John 17:17)
 - 3. The Spirit of Christ, the Agent of our sanctification (1 Peter 1: 2)