

How Can They Teach That?

(And Still Claim to Believe the Bible)

by

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Leader's Guide

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Leader's Notes

What is this Bible study about?

Recent statements on homosexuality have aroused the curiosity of our church members. They cannot understand how some Lutherans and other mainline churches can accept and promote homosexuality even though Scripture clearly labels it a sin.

This is a study about why many churches have adopted positions on four different topics that go against what Scripture clearly says. It shows how the higher critical method of interpreting Scripture has allowed human reason to distort God's clear Word.

Lesson 1 gives a brief history of the Enlightenment and German Rationalism, which changed how many churches approach Scripture. Lessons 2 through 5 deal with the four topics. Lesson 6 contains things to think about to help us avoid falling into the trap of higher criticism.

Each of the lessons shows what the Bible says on the topic and also provides quotations and commentary. The quotations give class members insight into how rationalism has worked its way into how many churches approach Scripture. Their claim to believe Scripture is true in a sense, but their low view of Scripture and high view of human reason leads them to marginalize Scripture.

A sad study

In many ways this is a sad Bible study. Again and again, the class will come face-to-face with statements that cannot be considered anything other than blasphemy. The statements of other churches, often those from a Lutheran denomination—the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), cause sorrow because of half-truths (true statements mixed with false teachings) and outright contradictions of Scripture. We continually think of the many Christians who are being bombarded with arguments that destroy their appreciation of and love for God's Word.

A positive study

If you focus only on the tragic results of higher criticism and rationalism, you and your class members may find this study to be a negative experience. As a teacher, you should keep a number of things in mind to assure a positive outcome.

1. Use each lesson to help the class appreciate the great blessing they have as members of a confessional synod, which by God's grace continues to approach Scripture as God intended—just as the believers in the Bible approached it. In a roundabout way, the negative examples of the liberal churches will help your class appreciate what they have and recognize the arguments of human reason when they see them.
2. Let each lesson be an opportunity to discuss right and wrong ways of interpreting Scripture. Understanding what the various churches teach on the topics is not the main reason for the course, although that will be one of the outcomes. As much as you can, keep the class focused on the underlying reason for the liberal churches' false teachings, namely, how they have let reason dominate their use of Scripture.

Your class will want to talk about the topics themselves and will ask you questions that depart from the basic purpose of the course. Each of the topics could be the subject of a special study, and the leader will have to make a judgment on how deeply to go into each question or whether to defer it to a future course.

How to use this course

The course is comprised of six lessons. However, the lessons are quite long and have the potential of eliciting a lot of discussion. Each lesson, particularly Lessons 2 through 5, could easily go for two or more sessions. Eight to ten weeks spent on this material may not be the wisest use of your Bible study time. The weeks will likely drag on as the class is exposed to one false teaching after another.

In a way, this course is a resource tool rather than a set of lessons that are taught in their entirety, one after another.

Here are some suggestions on how to use this material:

- Teach the highlights of each lesson over a period of five or six weeks. Class members can read the text portions of the lesson at home either as review or to supplement what you were not able to cover.
- Set the foundation with Lesson 1, and then ask the class which of the four topics they want to cover. They may choose to cover one or two in more detail, or three in a more cursory way. You may know of a particular “hot” topic your class members have asked you about in private and focus on that topic, perhaps giving them the option to choose the second topic. Leave the last lesson open to give you extra time to finish if you get behind and to discuss the points made in Lesson 6, which will take 20-30 minutes to cover.
- Teach a manageable portion of each lesson. When you provide the lesson material, supply the leader's guide material for the questions you will not cover.
- Plan to teach only one of the topics—the one in which your class members have expressed an interest. Use Lesson 1 to build the foundation, and then work through all the material in the lesson you choose. This assumes the class is familiar with the foundational material in Lesson 1.

In each lesson, you will have to decide whether to read all the commentary or to summarize it in your own words. This will depend on your background and on how much advance work you want to do.

Some leaders will be content to use the basic examples found in this study. Others will be able to supplement these with examples of their own. Advance planning on how you want to approach this course will help you make the best use of your time.

Lay leaders will want to seek help from their pastors to better understand some of the content of this study. They will likely want to read the commentary and work through the questions in order.

This course does not focus on the doctrinal issues higher criticism has cast doubt on, such as the Savior's virgin birth or his resurrection. You might want to discuss this fact at some point so members do not think that the higher critics have attacked only the issues covered in this study. The doctrinal issues are actually more important and strike at the center of our faith.

Thanks to Mr. Mark Bergemann, Good Shepherd's Lutheran Church, West Allis, Wisconsin, for assembling some of the basic documents used in this course.

May the Lord bless your work and may it lead your members to a humble attitude toward God's Word.

Robert Koester

Lesson One

A “New” Way of Looking at Scripture

Worship

Read responsively 1 Samuel 3:1-10.

Leader: The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

Group: One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

L: Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

G: Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

L: The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy.

G: So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

All: Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have given us the message of the gospel. Through your grace we have come to faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin. We sit at your feet to learn more about you, about your Son, and about the hope you have given us. When we read your Word, give us the same spirit of humility as Samuel displayed when he said, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Amen.

Introduction

This is the first lesson in a Bible study about how some churches handle—or, rather, mishandle—God’s Word. In the course of this study, we hope to accomplish the following goals:

- To understand why many churches have changed their approach to Scripture.
- To learn why many churches are abandoning their historic stand on four issues that Scripture clearly teaches: creation, women serving in the public ministry, homosexuality, and early life issues/abortion.