

A GUIDE TO PERSONAL WORK USING THE BIBLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to provide supplementary information for those who are using the Bible Study Questionnaire to teach others the truth. This introduction provides some general considerations and suggestions with regard to overall approach. This includes considerations of who should teach, the focus on God's word, difficult questions, and the attitude of the teacher.

First and foremost, recognize that there is no power in a method or a personality. The power is in the gospel and in the gospel alone (Rom. 1: 16). Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God (Rom. 10: 17). If you can keep someone studying and learning God's word long enough, they *will* be converted! Only when they refuse to continue hearing will they put themselves beyond hope. We need to continue to make every effort put the total emphasis on the gospel and its power to do the converting.

It is recognized that each Christian will develop a unique approach toward personal work. This guide is not an effort to discourage individual effort in this regard. Rather, it is to provide some hints and aids, and to furnish a starting point to those new at this most important task.

1.1 WHO SHOULD TEACH

Teaching others the gospel of Jesus Christ is the noblest activity that anyone can perform. The soul of the prospect is most certainly at stake, and this should make us approach this activity with considerable sobriety. Since all Christians are commanded to engage in this activity (Mat. 28: 18-20) to the best of our abilities, we should not retreat from any opportunity to spread God's word. There are certain people that only *you* can reach.

Many feel inadequate and uncomfortable in teaching. The questionnaires are designed to ease these problems, especially for those who have little teaching experience. Recognize that you do not have to be an "expert" in the Bible in order to teach the truth. In fact, if you know enough to become a Christian, you know enough to teach someone else to obey the truth. Sometimes the experts fall flat on their faces while the sincere new convert is very effective in expounding the simplicity of God's word.

You should not feel responsible to teach anything that you do not totally understand. Never be ashamed to admit that you do not know the answer to a given question, and cheerfully seek the help of your fellow Christians in getting the scriptural basis for a response. Do not respond to a question unless you are totally sure that you can give book, chapter, and verse for your statements. It is so much better to respond to your prospect: "I am not sure of the answer to that, so let me find the scriptures and get back to you when we meet next week." Rather than showing weakness, this reinforces the prospect's appreciation for your dependency upon God's word.

1.2 (RE)FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

The major advantage of the questionnaire method is that it focuses attention upon the Bible as opposed to the thoughts of man. Because the questionnaires contain no narrative materials whatsoever, all of the knowledge obtained to answer the questions must come from the Bible itself. While there is nothing wrong with the use of supplementary materials in teaching the Bible, there is a danger of the prospect believing that such material emanates from some super organization or denominational clergy. That such is needed is a very common *misconception*, due to the nature of the vast majority of religious organizations with which most prospects are familiar. The *correction* of this misconception is one of the *most critical* aspects of leading someone to the truth. The prospect should see that the objective is not to switch religious organizations but to render total obedience to Jesus Christ.

The continuous *redirection* of attention away from an organizational perspective and toward the Bible is one of the most important aspects of your teaching, and it could be more important than any other point of doctrine. If you can instill within your prospect the belief that the Bible is God's word, that it is understandable, and that its teachings are unique, most other doctrinal points will take care of themselves. While respect for scriptural authority might seem rather elementary to you, it is a *radical* departure for most religious people. This is because they have been taught from their earliest understanding that: (1) the Bible is too hard to understand -- only those educated in divinity degree should attempt to draw conclusions from it, (2) you can prove anything with the Bible, (3) it doesn't matter what you believe (within reason), just so that you are sincere, etc.

In this regard, your prospect may become very uncomfortable, and possibly shocked, when *definitive* answers are given to religious and moral questions (see Mat. 7: 28-29). It is essential that you not fall into the trap of voicing your own opinions that cannot be supported by scripture. This is essentially the same as denominational methods for establishing their beliefs. *Refocus*: remember, what "I" believe is not important, what counts is what the Bible says.

Let's consider some scenarios to exemplify refocus on God's word. The responses given below could be obnoxious to your prospects if not presented with love and a sincere desire for their souls. The objective is not to win an argument; it is to communicate the truth in the most *effective* way possible. The suggested responses are to exemplify ways in which you can refocus from the typical religious discussion to a concentration upon determining what the Bible says on a given subject. Consider the following scenarios:

1. Prospect: "What does your church teach on ...?" Suggested response: "Those with whom I worship respect *only* the Bible, and it says ..." *Rationale: In the denominations the concept that doctrines and traditions emanate from some super organization, called the "church," is quite common. This is a holdover from Roman Catholic concepts. Answering this question directly infers that there is some "church-of-Christ" organization that makes our doctrine as well. Net result: no difference is seen and the denominational concepts are reinforced.*
2. Prospect: "What do you believe on ...?" Suggested response: "What I believe does not matter, what is important is what the Bible teaches. ... (go on to give scriptural references)..."

Rationale: The denominational concept is that one person's belief is just as good as another's, which is true as long as none of them hold a Biblical view. Since the Bible is generally not the sole basis for their views, much time is spent in interesting conversations attempting to determine what each other believes as opposed to determining the unique statements of the Bible. When we enter into such discussions with an "I think," or an "I believe" we merely reinforce the view that we acquire the basis for what we believe in the same way that everyone else does.

3. Prospect: "Where is your church?" Suggested response: "The Bible teaches that the church consists of those who are called out by Christ. The Bible never uses the word "church" to mean a building." *Rationale: Here the problem is the common vs. Bible meaning of the word "church." While most prospects readily agree that the use of the word to apply to a building is not scriptural, they continue to use it that way. In addition, they do not understand its proper use. They might say that "the church is the people," but for the most part they do not view it as a bottom-up organization of individuals (Mat. 18:20), which forms as a result of the obedience of several individuals in a given area. Rather, they see it as a top down, pre-existing mystical organization which we "join." When we talk of the Lord's church in these same terms it tends to reinforce this error. While this is something that cannot be overcome easily, the truth can be taught by consistently going over the correct use of the word and the Bible teachings on the nature of the Lord's church.*
4. Prospect: "What church do you belong to?" Suggested response: "I have done my best to find that group of Christians who are committed to serving the Lord to the best of their ability strictly according to the teachings of the New Testament." *Rationale: It is important that the prospect not view your evangelistic effort as a "church requirement" (e.g., as is true with the Jehovah's witnesses and the Mormons). In fact, it is not. It is your individual response to the commands of the New Testament, not what the church is mandating. The important thing is not our confession of our church (which will be viewed as a denominational organization by prospects), it is our confession of Jesus Christ. We are not trying to convert people to "the church of Christ," we are trying to convert them to Christ himself. Given that they are converted, they will affiliate themselves with the right organization.*
5. Prospect: "You're the church that doesn't believe in organs or pianos, aren't you?" Suggested response: "Our only objective is to worship God in the way that he has stated in the New Testament. While the absence of an instrument is an obvious distinction, virtually all of our work and worship is different from that found in most religious organizations." *Rationale: Instrumental music is a symptom, not a cause. The question is not personal preference, nor the teaching or practice of a given church. The question is: what does the Bible teach? Many people feel comfortable if they can identify some peculiarity which effectively "defines" a given religious organization. If this is the only difference between "them and us," then this is a rather insignificant difference, which reinforces the general beliefs of denominationalism.*

6. Prospect: "There really isn't a whole lot of difference between what you believe and what we believe." Suggested response: "The difference is in the source of authority. If a given religious organization does *one* thing by Biblical authority, why doesn't it do *everything* by Biblical authority?" *Rationale:* While we do not want to emphasize differences, if the prospect does not see significant differences between their beliefs and practices and the teachings of the New Testament, they have no reason to even consider changing.

7. Prospect: "Isn't that just your opinion?" Suggested response: "You will not be judged by my opinion, and my opinion should not affect you in any way. All that we should be concerned with is what the Bible says. If what I am saying is in fact what the Bible teaches, then we will all be judged by it. So let's study to determine what the Bible says and determine if this is just a matter of opinion." *Rationale:* Again the focus is off of our opinions and back on the Bible.

In many of the cases above the question itself is ambiguous (i.e., it could easily mean one thing to the questioner and another thing to the one answering). This is not to say that they are not sincere attempts at learning the truth! It is normal and natural for prospects to ask these types of questions, and they fully represent the orientation of most religiously trained people in our society. But, giving the *obvious* answer to such questions will generally not communicate a complete understanding of the truth to the prospect. Any answer that reinforces the major concepts of denominationalism does not communicate the truth. The responses given are offered as examples of ways to refocus thought from the denominational concepts to Biblical authority.

All of the problems above tend to have a common thread of a misunderstanding of the nature of the Lord's church. They have never experienced religion separate and apart from some (usually universal) pre-existing organization. Our society in general seems to be incapable of doing much without institutionalization. Individual efforts and responsibility seem to become more and more scarce. While the church is God's ordained organization through which we mutually support each other and serve God, it functions as a *result* of individual obedience, and it is not the primary *cause* of it. The clergy-laity concept of the denominations is just the opposite of the Biblical concept. Essentially, the clergy does the religion and most of the individual members would have little idea of how to function religiously without the clergy (organization).

It is inconceivable to most prospects that an organization can exist with no other authoritative guide than the Bible. All denominations and other false religious organizations (including liberal apostasies within the church) cannot last long without an organization above that of the local congregation. [It is essential to their consistency.] If, in fact, it is impossible to just have the Bible as the authority (and this is the general denominational belief), then the arrangement that we have (total congregational autonomy) is also impossible. It is important that we understand the preconceived beliefs that we are up against if we are to be effective in combating it. However, these crumble quickly if the prospect has love for the truth.

1.3 WHO IS SAVED?

Due to the high potential stumbling-block nature of this question, we consider it as a separate subsection:

Prospect: "Do you believe that only members of your church will be saved?" Suggested response: "I believe exactly what you do on this issue. Mat. 7:21 says that 'not every one that saith unto me 'lord, lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father who is in heaven.' Everyone who has done God's will has entered His church. Let's study God's word and determine just what God's will is."

Rationale:

It is very strange and "cultist" in most people's view for you to think that the way that *you believe* is the only way that is acceptable to God. *Refocus*: it is not what *we believe* that is perfect and unique, it is what the Bible says. We do not claim to have perfect knowledge of it, and even that which we do know, we often fall short of due to our own sin. However, this does not change reality. The Bible is the word of God, and it can be understood and obeyed. It is our obligation to teach it to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Recognize that the most predominant unwritten doctrine of denominationalism is that of toleration. According to this doctrine, you can believe and teach a broad range of doctrines, but you cannot teach that others are wrong, or, if you do, it cannot infer that their sin will condemn them to hell. Thus, the question (Do you believe that you are the only ones saved?) is posed, usually to put you on the defensive. After all, how could *anyone* believe such a thing?

Obviously, any quick answer to this question will not communicate the truth on this subject. The important thing to communicate is that what we believe on this issue does not in any way control reality. If I am lost, the entire world believing that I am saved will not make me one inch closer to being saved, and vice versa. Again, it is essential that we not argue this issue, but rather refocus on what the Bible teaches.

I am glad that I am not the judge, and I refuse to be drawn into judging. However, if I did not believe that those out of Christ were lost, I would not bother to teach them the gospel. All religious groups (except possibly Universalists) believe that those who are not in fellowship with God are lost. Otherwise, they would not evangelize.

As with most of the questions above, the major problem in answering this question has to do with a misunderstanding of what constitutes the Lord's church. The definition of what constitutes "members of *your* church" is not of common understanding. The Bible does not recognize any church other than the Lord's church, which He said He would build in Mat. 16: 18. By definition, all faithful members of the Lord's church are saved, and anyone outside of the Lord's church is lost. Thus, if "our church" is the Lord's church, then only members of it are saved. It behooves us to study the Bible and assure that the church that we have been added to is not "our" church but the Lord's church.

1.4 ATTITUDE OF LOVE

It is important to recognize that conversion is not just a small adaptation from denominational thinking -- it is a complete revolution in the way of looking at *everything*. It will require a major change in outlook, friends, habits, recreational activities, and possibly job and family relationships. Inferring that the differences between the prospect's current beliefs and the Bible are relatively small cannot precipitate such a major change. Not only is this counterproductive to conversion, it is a deception! This is not to say that every attempt should be made to take advantage of the similarities and possible commonalities in our beliefs that arise from our common understanding of God's word. However, when real differences exist, what seems to be an accommodating compromise can be sending an extremely misleading message.

While it is essential to communicate the difference to the prospect, this must be done in a loving and kind manner. In fact, the *attitude* of the teacher could have much more effect upon the prospect than the facts that are taught (rightfully or wrongfully). The most important thing is to keep from getting emotionally involved, especially in argumentation. Do not teach yourself, teach Christ. If the teaching is rejected, it is not a rejection of you, it is a rejection of Christ. This will create sadness in you if you have the proper love for your prospect; it should not create any animosity.

Recognize that every objection does not have to be addressed, especially right at the time that it is raised. It takes a tremendous amount of wisdom to know what to reply to and when to address it. Argumentation should be avoided, and subjects that require maturity to understand should be deferred until that maturity is attained.

In this regard there are a number of popular subjects that are not the best starting points for teaching the gospel. Social drinking, divorce and remarriage, instrumental music, premillennialism, and many other subjects should be deferred until the first principles are covered. It is not that the Bible is not definitive on these subjects -- it is. However, those in need of milk cannot be expected to be able chew and digest meat. On the other hand, the first principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ are very simple and clear to anyone who is interested in learning. These are the subjects covered in the questionnaire.