

THE FLORAL HEIGHTS INFORMER

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Is there Authority for Sunday Bible Classes?

The question of whether a congregation of God's people may assemble before worship service and have a Bible study is not that old. Divisions among churches of Christ over the use of one cup in the worship service and no Bible class began in the early 1900's. Ronny Wade, a one cup no Bible class preacher, has researched out the origin of the "modern Sunday school" finding its origins to be at 1780 under the leadership of Robert Raikes (1735-1811) of Gloucester, England (see *The Sun Will Shine Again Someday* (Springfield, Missouri: Yesterday's Treasures, 1986 - A quote taken from Dr. Dallas Burdette in his article titled, "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" written January 4, 1999 [www.freedominchrist.net]; Note that all research quotes found in this article were taken from Dr. Dallas' 1999 article). Many others have written articles and taken a firm stand against a pre-worship Bible study stating that it is not authorized by God. This article shall give a brief history of the no Bible class controversy, examine the reason behind the objection, and then look to the subject of Bible authority for an answer to the question, "Is there Authority for Sunday Bible Classes?"

History of the No Bible Class idea

Alexander Campbell originally associated the Sunday Bible class to "Bible Societies" that caused sects among Christians (1824) and thereby labeled it an unauthorized "institution" (Jan. 1827 edition of the Christian Baptist). Twenty years later Campbell had changed his mind and accepted the Bible classes as indicated in his April 1847 article in the Millennial Harbinger IV. David Lipscomb was an early proponent of Bible classes and thereby stirred up much controversy among those who disagreed. G. W. Harvey wrote about Lipscomb's beliefs in the January 15, 1888 Firm Foundation saying, "Admonition for parents to teach

Local News:

Welcome to all our visitors:

We pray that you will be edified by our service and that you will ask questions if things are not as you are accustomed to seeing. Please do come back at your every opportunity!

Announcements:

There are some of our members fighting ongoing illnesses and discouragement. Give them a call and let them know you are praying and thinking about them.

There are many of our members traveling over the holiday week. Please keep them in your daily prayers.

New Acts study has now been posted on our website: www.floralheightschurchofchrist.org

Continue to pray for our shut-ins:

Stella Davidson
696-1030 (Home)

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692-0489 (Home).

the Bible to their children lays no foundation for Sunday school... Away with Sunday Schools, even if Bro. Lipscomb had memorized the whole New Testament at Sunday school... If the apostles did not have Sunday Schools, he continued, we do not need them and should not have them."

J. T. Showalter wrote an essay in April of 1910 about Sunday school for the *Gospel Advocate* saying, "Whenever any man proves the Sunday school to be of divine authority, he can prove missionary societies to be of divine authority. By all rules of logic, he that would the one retain, must to the other cling. I emphatically deny that there is any divine authority for Sunday-schools either by precept or precedent, hint or allusion. . . . In all the writings of the New Testament there is not one word that even squints in that direction. Not a word is said about a Sunday-school superintendent, a Sunday-school teacher, Sunday-school scholars or anything of that kind."

Objections to having a Bible Class

The above quotes illustrate that the question of Bible classes has been a point of heated contention. One may summarize the objections to Bible classes by three statements that really indicate one primary protest; i.e., Bible Authority. The three statements are: "We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent" (nothing said about Bible classes means no Bible class). Secondly, Bible classes are an innovation of man. Lastly, Bible classes are not according to the "pattern" (Heb. 8:5).

Is there Authority for a Bible Class?

The greatest of fools is the person who gives no regard to God's authorized words. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu stand through time as an example of those who did something God had not commanded (see Lev. 10:1). God's established patterns are to be given the utmost respect among His people (see Heb. 8:5). Moses carefully instructed Israel to never erect an idol of Jehovah because they did not see nor hear of any instructions to do so (see Deut. 4:9-14). The Apostle Paul wrote, "*Whatsoever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Col. 3:17). The greatest of care is to be given to doing all that God wills.

The Lord has given many commandments; however, that require man's judgments to carry out. The Lord said, "Go preach" but he did not say how to go. The Lord commands the first day of the week worship but does not specify an exact time.

The Lord commands His saints to assemble but leaves the place to man's judgment. We know that the Ephesian disciples assembled together on a daily bases for a Bible study at a school (see Acts 19:9). Did the "daily" study at the school include Sunday? The best way to answer these questions is to briefly examine the idea of expedience. Expedience is defined by the American Heritage dictionary as, "Appropriateness to the purpose at hand. Something that is a means to an end" (477). Moulton's Greek English Lexicon defines Expediency as, "to contribute or lead to a specific result" (384).

We may consider expedience when answering a multitude of Bible authority questions. One may asks, "Is it lawful to construct a gymnasium with the Lord's treasury?" The answer to such a question is determined by whether or not God directly commanded, gave an example, or necessarily inferred that a gymnasium may be built with church funds. Though God has not said, "Thou shalt not construct a gymnasium" we know that it would not be expedient to do so because the Lord has specifically told us what to do with the church treasury. My judgments in matters of expedience must, thereby, take God's authoritative word into consideration. I cannot bind something on others that God did not bind and neither can I loose things that God has not loosed (see Matt. 16:19-20).

God has given us examples of Bible studies and Bible teachers (see Acts 19:9). God has commanded our first day of the week worship (see Acts 20:7ff). Would it be expedient (i.e., appropriate and contribute to brethren's edification) to have a Bible study separate from the worship assembly on the first day of the week? God did not say, "Thou shalt not have a Bible study on Sunday" but He did tell us to worship. Does such reasoning fall into the "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent?" Is our question answered by our responsibility to follow God's established "pattern?" The answer is yes. Bible classes are expedient in relation to passages such as Acts 19:9 and do no violence to the five acts of worship that are conducted separately on the first day of the week. Most of us watch a football game on Sunday, take a nap, do some grocery shopping, go for a jog, and do many things on the first day of the week other than worship. God did not command us to do those things and neither has he prohibited it. Such activities are not innovations of man because they do not violate God's direct commands, examples, and necessary inference. Such actions are rather expedient judgments we make with our time. Why would a Bible class, which we have examples of in the Bible, be wrong to have it on a Sunday apart from the worship?

There is another area of concern in relation to Bible classes on Sunday. Some churches separate out the children during their worship time for "children's church." Many denominational bodies do this to keep the children interested in "church" because the worship service is geared toward the adults. Please take careful note that "children's church" takes the place of divinely ordained and commanded worship. If it would not be ok for an adult to participate in an alternate worship why would it be ok for children? Children will not learn how to worship God if they are not in the worship assembly. Some contend that the church of Christ is hypocritical in that we divide up our Bible studies into different classes such as young children, junior and senior high classes yet condemn the denominations for children's church. Again, please note the inconsistency. God authorizes worship and God authorizes Bible classes. **One does not replace the other.** It is a matter of expediency that different age groups be divided up to study at their level of mental maturity. Again, there is no violence done to God's divine and authorized pattern of authority; however, when one overlaps the two (such as children's church) violence has been done to God's authorized pattern.