



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

THE “ANTI-SUNDAY SCHOOL” GROUP

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A job transfer brought them to our area where we were one of only a couple churches within a reasonable driving distance of their home. They soon placed their membership with us and proved to be good additions — well-versed in Scripture, active, and generally present for our services.

But, they didn't attend Sunday Bible classes. His background was in a congregation that saw Sunday school as an unauthorized addition to New Testament teaching. From conversations with him, I learned that the group's stance had to do with an understanding about dividing up the church on the Lord's day. They continued their practice for some time as they worked with us before eventually changing their view and practice.

Because of our conversations, I knew why they didn't attend Sunday classes. I didn't know why the other 35% (on average) of our group didn't. I did suspect most of them would have objected had our elders considered discontinuing Sunday school.

What was the difference between the “anti-Sunday school” couple and that 35%? The couple understood the New Testament to teach a thing; many of the others just didn't come.

Sunday school as we know it began in the 19th century. But, that's not the beginning of the church's practice of formally teaching Scripture. We know a catechism was used as early as the third century. What began sixteen centuries later was a particular method of instruction.

That churches are to teach is a given. The first converts were approved for continual devotion to “the apostles' teaching” (Acts 2:42). Teaching is emphasized throughout the New Testament, as in texts like Ephesians 4:11-16, where “teachers” are among those charged to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Even the idea of a catechism has New Testament roots. The verb *katēcheō* appears eight times, five of which refer to instruction in the Christian faith (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6; cf.

Rom. 2:18). The question, then, is not whether we should teach, but how and when we will do so.

A few years after the “anti-Sunday school” couple came to us, we temporarily added a second Sunday morning worship service to accommodate our attendance growth. Our earlier service was the best attended, with classes scheduled between the two. Class attendance jumped from the 65-70% of worship attendance it had averaged for years to 85-90%. When we finished our new auditorium and classrooms and returned to a one service schedule, we scheduled worship first with classes following. Bible class numbers remained high — right up to the time we decided to go change our schedule back to what it had been before. From then on, our class attendance settled back at the 65-70% level it had always been.

Apparently, my suspicion had merit: the reason many did not attend Bible classes had to do with something other than a conviction about its propriety.

Lord willing, we’ll meet for classes again this Wednesday at 7:00 pm and next Sunday at 9:00 am. Will we see you there?

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