

Already Gone

Introduction. We have addressed many issues of creation and evolution over the last year. Older Christians who were never taught evolutionary doctrine in school may be asking, "What's the point? We all believe that God created the world." Not necessarily! We are going to use as the basis of this lesson research that has done over the broad spectrum of religions in America. The results will shock you because we all realize that even though we have great doctrinal differences between us, the same trends effect us all (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Although we like to think that we live in a "Christian" nation, we have to reluctantly admit that we are living in a post-Christian society. The basic foundation of the Judeo-Christian heritage in this country no longer exists. It is already gone. Many years ago, we were like the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2), with the gospel being preached in homes and people obeying. Now, our society is more like the Greeks in Athens (Acts 17): agnostic and skeptical. Life in Athens was different than life in Jerusalem. When Paul preached to the Athenians, he had to go back and start at the very beginning. We will have to do the same to keep our children faithful.

I. ***An Epidemic On Our Hands***

- A. If you look at the state of Protestant denominationalism in Europe, and understand that these trends can repeat themselves among the Lord's people in America, then you realize that we are in big trouble. Churches in England are in a steady decline. Try looking to your right, and then to the left. Look at the children and teens around you. They have probably been attending here for years. Now imagine that two-thirds of them are gone. A mass exodus is underway in churches all over America. Most youth of today will not be returning tomorrow.
- B. Six out of 10 20-somethings who were involved in a church during their teen years are already gone. We usually think that if a pre-teen and teenager is heavily involved in activities of the congregation, then they will stay. However, the research shows that this is not the case at all. Only 20% of the ones who were spiritually active during high school are maintaing a similar level of commitment in adulthood. Could we possibly be one generation away from the evaporation of the church as we know it? Where Europe is today spiritually, America will be tomorrow.
- C. Most of us assume that students are lost in college. We have always been trying to prepare our children for college, and that is still critical, but it turns out that only 11% of those who have left the Lord were still attending during their college years. Almost 90% of them were lost in middle school and high school. By the time they got to college

they were already gone! In fact, we are losing many more people by middle school and high school than we will ever lose in college.

- D. Our entire culture (including secular schools) is aggressively teaching the apologetics of evolution and secular humanism. They teach our students to believe in and defend a humanistic worldview. Nearly four out of five of the children studied said that they had instructors in school who taught them that the earth was obviously millions of years old. Three out of five said their school instructors taught that life definitely evolved from lower forms of life to more complex forms. Amazingly, a full 62% of the sample did not believe all the accounts and narratives in the Bible. Most of those who do not believe in the full accuracy of the Bible began to doubt in elementary, middle, and high school.
- E. Among those surveyed who had left active service in their denomination, only 20% believed that the earth was less than 10,000 years old. Thankfully, the majority of people leaving do not believe in evolution. This is actually the norm in our society as a whole. The universities and high schools are proclaiming evolution as an absolute fact. But after all their efforts, most people intuitively see it as false. Common sense tells them that something just does not “appear” by itself.
- F. One bright spot in the research is that some of the young people who left eventually plan on returning after they have families of their own. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation (76.4%) between believing in the creation account and whether they would come back. There is a tie between what they believe about Genesis and their attitude toward the gospel. If we can do a better job of teaching proper belief, we will at least increase the possibility that these children will return after they have children.

II. ***The Need For A Ready Defense***

- A. How did we get to this point? Sadly, it most likely all started when modern religion gave people “millions of reasons” to doubt the Bible. In the late 18th and early 19th century, the idea that the earth is millions and billions of years old began to emerge in the scientific community of Europe. Many leaders of Protestant denominations began to compromise, allowing interpretations of the Bible that fit millions years into the Genesis account. This paved the way for Darwin to present his ideas on biological evolution. This, in turn, paved the way for the conclusion that the Bible cannot be trusted.
- B. Denominations began to make a disconnect at this point, and it continues to this day. It was the beginning of the road to irrelevancy, not of the Bible, but of the church. Christians gave up earthly

evidences (e.g., the biological, anthropological, astronomical, geological history as recorded in Genesis 1-11) and focused on heavenly realities (e.g., spirituality, relationships, the gospel). We preach the gospel of the crucifixion and the resurrection. We preach about trusting Jesus and morality -- but all the while, the attack on Genesis is raging, causing doubt and fueling unbelief, and undermining everything we say! When it came to science, Christians gave in to human notions.

1. In America today, where do you go to learn about the geological, biological, anthropological, or astronomical history of the universe? School. That is where our children learn what they perceive is the real, relevant material. In Bible class they learn "Bible stories," and these have become the equivalent of "spiritual fairy tales" to many children. We need to impress with children that Bible history is real history!
 2. Brethren today generally do not talk about geology, dinosaurs, fossils, or the age of the earth (aside from a few "experts" who hold meetings and lectureships) -- that is left up to the schools and colleges. Effectively, Christians basically hand over the history of the universe to the secular educational institutions, and concentrates on the spiritual and moral aspects of the Bible.
- C. The serpent in the garden laid down doubt that would lead to the sin that would distort, decay, and bring death to the perfection God had created (Genesis 3:1-4). This attack was meant to cause Adam and Eve to reinterpret God's word based on their own appraisal. If we are going to stop the epidemic, it needs to happen in the church and in the home during the elementary, middle school, and high school years (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 139:24). Because of this, we need to have a ready defense.
1. Biblical authority demands that we be able to defend the gospel (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3). With an increasing number of people doubting God's existence, God's creation, Jesus' deity, and the inspiration of the Bible, the Christian will find an increased demand upon him to be able to defend these (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It was Paul's custom to teach the gospel by presenting the evidence that documented the truthfulness of the gospel (Acts 17:2-3; 19:8). That is how Peter preached the first gospel sermon -- by presenting the evidence defending Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2). Remember, an attack on the word of God in Genesis 1-11 is an attack on the gospel!
 2. A ready defense will strengthen our faith. A young person's impressionable mind is a prime target for the devil's ungodly schemes (Ephesians 6:16). Through a study of biblical evidences,

Christians will see that the gospel does not promote an "I hope so" religion. The Bible is grounded in historical fact. Its roots are deep and its precepts are provable. Through a study of apologetics, we can show young people that they can know God exists, know He created the world, know Jesus is God's Son, and know the Bible is God's inspired, authoritative word. In so doing, we can give young people a clear view of their God, His Son, and their future home in heaven.

3. A ready defense demonstrates the validity of the gospel. Truth welcomes the searchlight of scrutiny, confident that it cannot be disproved. A religion that discourages logical examination of its claims is admitting the doubtfulness of its position. As young people are shown the massive amount of evidence that proves God's existence, God's creation, Jesus' Sonship, and the Bible's inspiration -- and as they examine other claims (atheism, agnosticism, denominationalism, etc.) -- eventually they will come to accept, and be able to defend, the one true religion of the one true God (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 2:2).
 4. A ready defense can save not only our own souls and the souls of our children, but the souls of others as well. We cannot teach what we do not know (Hebrews 5:12). Our goal is heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16). Our mission is not only to get there ourselves, but to take as many others as possible with us (Matthew 28:18-20). It is our task to learn God's word (Psalm 119:11) and then to convey that word to others for their salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16). Our society today is a questioning one -- and rightly so. People must investigate the claims of the Bible and then see for themselves that those claims are legitimate, factual, and above all, true.
- D. As members of the church who are left, we tend to blame the epidemic on those who have left. We label them as apostate, insincere, uncommitted, lazy, or indifferent. But we must realize that part of the blame lies with us. As a parent or relative, you must stop thinking that Bible classes will solve the problems detailed in this lesson. We love our Bible class teachers, and they are doing as good a job as possible, but ultimately they cannot fill the void of necessary apologetic material for our young people. Most of our material is geared for "the Jew in Jerusalem" who has a developed religious background and lives in a religiously friendly society. That is just not the case anymore. Our society is now immersed in secularism. We must learn how to defend and teach the Bible from the very first verse. If not, the slow and steady decay of belief will continue.

E. Before we end, we must make the point that the research showed not to use entertainment to bring young people back or to try to keep them. Many churches (and we are not immune) are trying to go for easy fixes by creating an experience that is exciting, dynamic, and fun. The sermon is shortened and made more entertaining while music becomes more prominent. However, only one percent of the 1,000 young adults surveyed left their congregations because of the music. A significant portion of those who left reported that they really did miss the preaching of God's word. We can never let the preaching of the Bible take a back seat. If we do, the church will lose its relevancy.

Conclusion. When we start our thinking with God's word, we see that the world is only a few thousand years old. The age of the earth ultimately comes down to a matter of trust -- it is a worldview issue. Will you trust what an all-knowing God says or will you trust imperfect man's assumptions and imaginations about the past that regularly are changing (Isaiah 66:1-2)?

If one allows science (which has wrongly become synonymous with evolution and materialism) to determine our understanding of scripture, then this can lead to a slippery slope of unbelief in the rest of scripture. For instance, science would proclaim that a person cannot be raised from the dead. Does this mean we should interpret the resurrection of Christ to reflect this? When people accept at face value what Genesis is teaching, they will have no problem accepting and making sense of the rest of the Bible. God's people need to realize that the word of God is something very special. It is not just the words of men (Proverbs 30:5-6; Isaiah 66:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).