

## Should I Go to that Bible Study?

### *Practical Wisdom Regarding Rogue Bible Studies*

We love a good Bible study! It would be difficult to find a church anywhere that studies the Bible more diligently than our church. However, what if you're invited to attend a Bible study *outside* our church? Led by someone that doesn't go to our church? At first you might think to yourself, "what could possibly be wrong with attending a Bible study led by a man or woman who outwardly appears to be a good Christian?" The following is practical wisdom to help you think through this issue.

First, some preliminary considerations:

1. A doctor has to meet some pretty tough accountability standards in order to practice medicine. The State has the authority to issue a license, and in the event of malpractice or unethical conduct, the State has the authority to revoke a license.
2. An attorney may be accountable to the American Bar Association which employs rigorous standards for the practice of law. The ABA has established ethical codes of conduct that help to protect the public.
3. **Bible teachers are to be accountable to the local church.** Spiritually qualified elders are to ensure that they meet biblical standards and that the spiritual food they are providing the flock is not poisonous. God established this standard so that we can protect and disciple those who want to follow Christ (1 Timothy 3:15).
4. Your soul is the most important thing you have (Matthew 16:26). You would do well to consider your soul above your physical health or legal rights.

The issue is one of **accountability and authority**. God has established a structure within the local church to protect you and to help you grow and mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 3:1-15). This structure also works to provide strong accountability to sound doctrine and standards for leadership. There can be serious consequences when this structure of accountability and authority in the local church is breached, ignored, or avoided. For example,

1. There are many who followed the folly of radio personality Harold Camping and suffered spiritual and financial loss in believing his unbiblical predictions regarding the rapture of the church on May 21, 2011 (Matthew 24:36-44).
2. Many began leaving their local churches and attending rogue Bible studies with a man they called "Pastor Russell." These Bible studies grew outside the authority and accountability of the local church and collectively formed the *Bible Student Movement*. The man behind the rogue study was Charles Taze Russell and the Bible Student Movement formed the Jehovah's Witness cult (2 Timothy 3:7).
3. A man we lovingly counseled for months circumvented the authority and accountability of the local church and attended a rogue study led by an unqualified "pastor" who denied the Trinity and the humanity of Christ. He later embraced this damning heresy and led his wife and children to the new church formed in the "pastor's" house (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

The Bible commends nothing related to "parachurch" organizations, rogue Bible studies, or other such groups disconnected from the authority and accountability of the local church and

God-ordained spiritual leadership. Often someone will form a group outside of the context of the local church for the very reason that they do not want to submit to accountability or qualifications for leadership. They will invite members of other churches because they do not have the authority from their own church to teach there. Bible study teachers **MUST** be *intimately* connected to the local church and **MUST** meet essential qualifications:

1. A Bible study leader must be ***genuinely converted***. Elders of the church must know them well and see fruit over time to have reasonable assurance that this is the case (2 Timothy 2:2).
2. A Bible study leader must be preaching the **correct gospel** and **sound doctrine**. Again, this takes time within the context of the local church to determine (Titus 1:9).
3. A Bible study leader must be **a member in good standing** of the same church as those they are inviting to the study. In this way the accountability and authority structure of the local church is preserved (Acts 6:3, Acts 20:28-31).
4. A Bible study leader must be **under the authority** of, and **in submission to**, the same spiritual leaders as those that will attend their Bible study (Hebrews 13:17).
5. A Bible study leader must have a track record of being **proven and tested in trial** and several years of proven submission to the elders of the local church where both they and Bible study members attend (1 Corinthians 11:19).
6. A Bible study leader must be **spiritually gifted** in both teaching and leading (Romans 12:6-8).
7. A Bible study leader must have a proven track record of both believing and articulating **accurate theology**. For example, if someone comes to our church after having attended an easy-believism church that taught the “four spiritual laws,” they may need *years* of “deprogramming” errant theological views or ideas and therefore are not qualified to lead a Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15).
8. A Bible study leader must have a verifiable and visible track record of **holy living**. It takes time within the context of a local church for this to be evident (2 Timothy 2:2).
9. A Bible study leader must have a proven record of years of practical application of the Scriptures as evidenced in making **wise decisions** (Romans 12:2). For example, someone who makes important decisions because they have prayed a long time and subjectively “feel led” is not qualified to counsel others in making important decisions (and will certainly make unwise decisions themselves).
10. A Bible study leader must have the **approval of the elders of their church to teach**. Because Bible study leaders must prove their doctrine and lifestyle and be in joyful accountability and submission to the local church, it is of paramount importance that they are intimately known by the church elders before being given any responsibility to shepherd others (1 Timothy 5:22).

We thoroughly understand the frustration a genuine Christian feels when they are not in a good church and hunger for fellowship and Bible study with other believers. The solution however is not to start or attend a rogue Bible study! The solution is to seek out a healthy, evangelistic, doctrinally sound local church, come under their authority, and join a Bible study already in progress. God’s process gets God’s protection, God’s provision, and God’s blessing!