

## Lesson Nine: Conclusion

The history and issues covered in this class have provided information with which one can evaluate the myriad of combinations and permutations that have created the contemporary denominational landscape. Along the way, a number of issues have arisen that will be examined in this final lesson.

### I. Why is Arminianism So Popular?

The idea that one must do something to gain and/or maintain his salvation seems natural. Grace is quite foreign to our natural way of thinking. Indeed, grace is *supernatural*. As a result, most use human reason to conclude that eternal life is something you must, in some way, earn. For instance, it is often reasoned that since eternal life is said to be a 'gift' (see Romans 6:23), then, like a gift, it can be returned at the will of the receiver. However, this fails to take into account the unique *nature* of the gift of eternal life – eternal gifts can't be returned!

### II. Why So Many Interpretations?

Many who have never taken a course on biblical hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) conclude, based on the plethora of interpretations that exist, that the Bible is a hopelessly obscure book. However, the reason there are so many interpretations is NOT that the Bible can mean different things to different people, but rather because we don't "play by the same rules." For instance, a rule of interpretation necessary for ANY communication is "a text can have only one meaning." The rules for interpretation are covered in CBC's *Community Institute* course, *Master Plan for Life*, Part I.

### III. What is the Nature of the Church?

Many mistakenly define the church primarily as an institution. In fact, Catholic apologist Scott Hahn, while recognizing the widespread corruption and abuse in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the centuries, still insists on teaching the institution as the true church. He marvels at the seeming indestructibility of the Catholic church, pointing out that sometimes the church was without armies, sometimes without scholars, and sometimes *even without saints!*<sup>1</sup> But is it possible for the church to be without saints?

This appears to be based on the same error the Jews of Jesus' day made about Israel. The Jews were mistaken in thinking that spiritual heritage comes through physical descent, and that "true" Israel was a visible institution. Paul corrected this error in Romans 9:6-8:

*It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Svendsen, *Evangelical Answers*, p. 53.

Following are a few of the passages that touch upon the universal and *holy* nature of the church:

*...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27)*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

#### **IV. How Can I Evaluate a Church?**

This course has attempted to offer a grid through which to evaluate churches, their origin and beliefs. Following is a preliminary checklist:

- Authority of Scripture
- Sola Fide* (salvation by faith alone)
- The Fundamentals* (Deity of Christ, Blood Atonement, etc.)
- Worship (How are the ordinances [sacraments] viewed?)
- Government (How is the church organized and run?)

If a church is correct on these issues, you've generally identified an "evangelical" church - one that believes and preaches the Gospel. However, in addition to doctrinal issues, there are philosophy of ministry issues that have not been covered in this class. For instance, is worship primarily a time of entertainment as in many churches today? A helpful, expanded checklist is provided at the following website: [www.spiritualdisciplines.org/ychurch.html](http://www.spiritualdisciplines.org/ychurch.html).