



## Session Objective

The sessions in this mini-course focus on that big chunk of the New Testament that follows the four Gospels. (If you are looking for a curriculum that covers the Gospels, please refer to *Faith Questions: Gospels*.) Because it would be impossible to study this part of the New Testament without also studying the birth and growth of the church, we begin with the church's beginnings: the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In this session, the participants will learn about the birth of the church as described in Acts, reflect on how the church is constantly being reborn through the work of the Spirit, and consider their own role in that ongoing rebirth.

## Faith Statement

By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers being vitally united to Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church, which is his body.

—Westminster Confession of Faith (6.054)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What do you already know about Pentecost? What questions do you have about Pentecost?
- What was the “energizing force” behind Pentecost?
- How do you picture, or how would you describe, the Holy Spirit?
- What is a spiritual gift? What forms do spiritual gifts take?
- How is Pentecost observed in our congregation?



## Explore

Read Acts 2:1–13 and the faith statement together and explore these questions:

- Based on your understanding of Pentecost, why is it significant that the events described in the passage took place on this particular day?
- Verse 3 suggests one reason why people in the church wear red on Pentecost. What other reasons can you think of?
- How are the events of this passage like or unlike what you’ve heard, learned, or experienced concerning “speaking in tongues”?
- Compare Acts 2:6–11 with Genesis 11:6–9. How are these two events similar and different?
- In verse 12, the people ask one another, “What does this mean?” Two thousand years later, how would you answer this question?
- What important “ingredients” do the Scripture passage and the faith statement share? What do they not share?



## Express

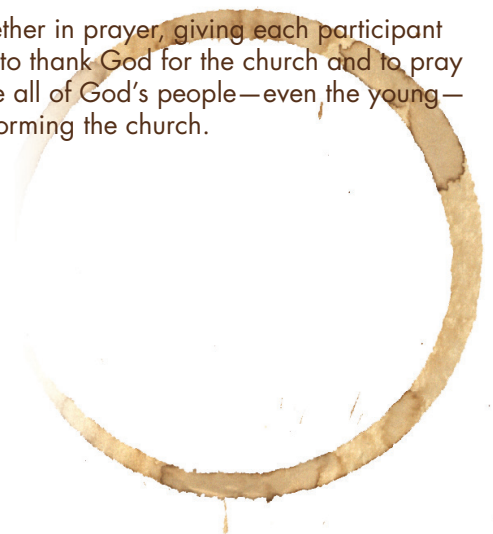
Use the following questions to help the participants express what they’ve learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- In what ways do you see the faith statement represented in your congregation? In what ways does your congregation seem to come up short?
- In a 2000 film called *Keeping the Faith*, a young minister named Brian says, “We needed to kick the dust off our faiths—bring them up to speed with the times. . . . No more of the old routines. We were going to bring our religions into the twenty-first century any way we could—we were going to shove them a little if we had to.” Is this a good goal? Why or why not?
- In your view, does your congregation need to have the dust kicked off it? Why or why not?
- What role do you see yourself having in the transformation of your church? How do you make sure that you’re cooperating with the Holy Spirit?



## Exit

Close your time together in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity both to thank God for the church and to pray that God will include all of God’s people—even the young—in the work of transforming the church.





# Why Do Some of the Books in the New Testament End with *-ans*?



## Session Objective

The Christian church as we know it—not to mention most of the New Testament—would probably not exist if it were not for the apostle Paul. In this session, the participants will explore a passage from Paul’s earliest known letter that reflects some of the hard work, as well as the utter reliance on God’s grace, that defined the early church.

## Faith Statement

**WHAT IS THE CHURCH?** The Church is an assembly of the faithful called or gathered out of the world; a communion, I say, of all saints, namely, of those who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God in Christ the Savior, by the Word and Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of all benefits which are freely offered through Christ.

—Second Helvetic Confession (5.125)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What questions do you have about how some of the books of the Bible got their names?
- By just taking a quick glance at the books that end in *-ans*, what can you discover that they have in common?



## Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 and explore these questions:

- Note that Paul reminds the Thessalonians of things that he or they did while Paul was with them. Why might Paul feel the need to remind the Thessalonians of these things? How is he hoping they will respond to this reminder? (*Hint: See vv. 11-12.*)
- Considering Paul’s tone and his many reminders of things the Thessalonians know or have experienced, how does Paul seem to feel about them? How would you feel if you received such a letter?
- What is Paul referring to when he mentions being “shamefully mistreated at Philippi” (v. 2)? (*Hint: See Acts 16:20-24.*)
- In Paul’s time, many traveling philosophers and preachers exploited people for food, lodging, and money and then, after wearing out their welcome, moved on to the next city. Paul wants to be sure that the Thessalonians don’t lump him in with that crowd; how does he make this point?
- What does Paul thank God for in verse 13? How do you know that something you are told or taught is God’s word and not a human word? (Think about the last sermon you heard. Did you think of it as God’s Word or just the preacher’s word? Why?)

- Some Bible scholars think verses 14-16 weren’t written by Paul but were instead added later by someone else. Some of the evidence is (a) that verse 17 seems to flow naturally from verse 13 and (b) that Romans 9:3-5 and 11:17-31 (which were definitely written by Paul) contradict this view of Jews and Judaism. Take a look at these pieces of evidence; what do you think?



## Express

Referring to the faith statement, use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned.

- What important “ingredients” do the Scripture passage and the faith statement share? What do they not share?
- What three things must the members of the church do in order to truly be the church? (*truly know, rightly worship, serve*) Why do these things matter?
- What three things enable the people to do what is required of them? (*Word, Holy Spirit, faith*)
- In what ways do you see the faith statement represented in your congregation? In what ways does your congregation seem to come up short?
- If there are ways that your congregation fails to embody the ideal of the faith statement, how might that be fixed?
- What role do you have in helping the church live up to the ideal of the Scripture passage and the faith statement? What gets in the way of you fulfilling that role, and how can such roadblocks be overcome?



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the great effort and risk to life and limb that people like Paul and the members of the early Christian church undertook to establish the faith and the Bible that we know today and praying that we might take our own faith journeys as seriously.



## Session Objective

What do we do with passages such as 1 Timothy 2:8-15, in which the writer holds that women should, among other things, "learn in silence with full submission," having no authority and not being permitted to teach in church? While there are denominations and churches today that adhere to this teaching, most, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), do not. Still, such passages continue to negatively impact women. The aim of this session is to help participants arrive at a deeper understanding of the task of scriptural interpretation and how the Bible reflects the circumstances under which it was written.

## Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.4)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Describe a time when you excluded someone else and/or were excluded by someone else. How did you feel?
- In your daily experience, what sorts of exclusion do you witness or experience? What sorts of people are excluded?
- Are you aware of any situations in which people who were excluded in the past have overcome their situation? Describe.
- Note the session question: "Why does the New Testament talk down to women?" This question was initially asked by a Presbyterian teenager who was wondering about the treatment of women in the New Testament. What examples, if any, of this "talking down to women" are you aware of?
- What is your reaction to the session question?



## Explore

Read 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and explore these questions:

- If verses 8-10 were rewritten with the word *people* in place of both *men* and *women*, would the teachings be worthwhile and acceptable? Why or why not?
- Look at verses 11-14. The author justifies this teaching by turning to the story of Adam and Eve. Look at Genesis 2-3. In your view, is the author's reasoning sound? Why or why not?

- The first part of verse 15 reads "Yet she will be saved through childbearing." Bible scholars argue that other acceptable translations include "she will be saved through the birth of the Child" (a reference to Jesus) and "she will be brought safely through childbirth." Which of these translations do you prefer? Why?
- In what ways does your church adhere to the teachings of 1 Timothy 2:8-15? If not at all, and if you were asked to justify your church's "disobedience" to Scripture, how would you do so?



## Express

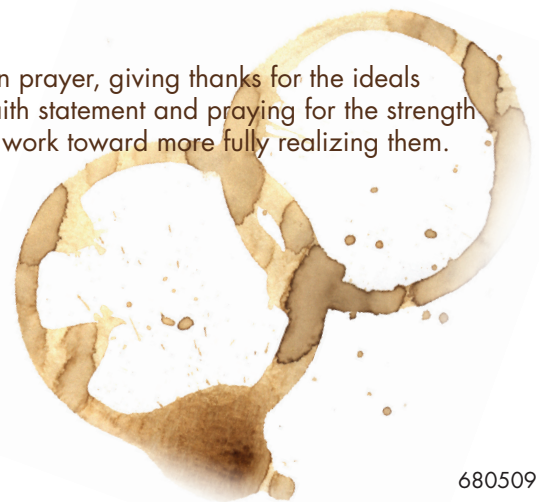
Referring to the faith statement, explore the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- To what extent does the faith statement agree or disagree with the teachings of the Scripture passage?
- Can the points of disagreement between the faith statement and the Scripture passage be reconciled? How?
- In what ways do you see the faith statement represented in your congregation? In what ways does your congregation seem to come up short?



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, giving thanks for the ideals expressed in the faith statement and praying for the strength and persistence to work toward more fully realizing them.





# What's Revelation All About? (And Should I Be Worried?)



## Session Objective

The book of Revelation is unlike any other book in the New Testament. Though it is rarely read, it is nonetheless widely talked about, misunderstood, and interpreted in a variety of sensationalized ways in popular culture. This session will help participants place Revelation in its historical context, but it also aims to extract the book's message of hope and examine how that message might apply to the church and world of today.

## Faith Statement

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

—Theological Declaration of Barmen (8.11–12)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How much of Revelation have you ever read?
- What do you know about Revelation? What questions do you have about it?
- As far as you know, how well do popular images and movies that portray the end of the world match the themes and plotline of Revelation?
- *Should* we be worried about the messages in Revelation?



## Explore

Read Revelation 13:11–14:5 and explore these questions:

- Many people are at least somewhat aware that the numbers 666 and 144,000 have symbolic meanings. What did you know—or think you knew—about these numbers before reading this passage?
- What is 666 thought by Bible scholars to symbolize? (Possibly the numerical value of the name "Nero Caesar" as written in Hebrew.) What about 144,000? (A multiple of twelve, the number of tribes of Israel.)
- What do these symbolic numbers mean to you, if anything?
- Revelation is meant to be a message of hope to the church in the face of persecution. What signs of hope can you see in this passage?
- Revelation addresses issues that faced the church in the time and place in which it was written: the first-century Roman Empire. What parallels can you see to the situation in the world today?
- What preconceived notions about Revelation did you have before beginning this study? How have those ideas changed or been reinforced in the course of this discussion?



## Express

Read the faith statement and share the background information from Understanding the Faith Statement in the Leader's Guide. Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- What parallels do you see between the Scripture passage and the faith statement, based on what you've learned about the situations facing the church at the times when these two documents were written?
- Should the church take stands against totalitarianism, injustice, and state-sanctioned persecution? Why or why not?
- What modern-day situations can you think of that call for a new "Barmen Declaration"?
- Has studying the Theological Declaration of Barmen helped you understand or appreciate Revelation in a new way? How so?



## Exit

Close the session by reading Revelation 21:1–7 out loud before closing in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to pray for a hopeful vision of God's plan as it unfolds in God's time.

