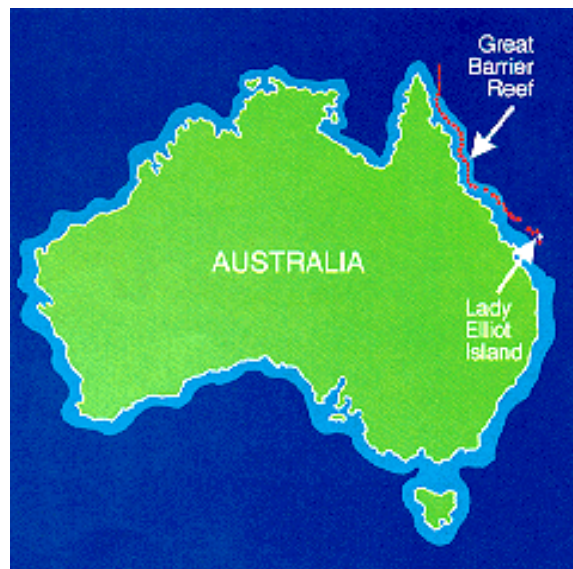


# Green County Church of Christ

## Vacation Bible School - 2016

### *Diving into the Word of God*



### Lesson Two: The Reef of Conformity

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”  
Romans 12:2a

### **Primary Series Aim:**

Students will gain insight, understanding and reinforcement in the knowledge of Jehovah God that will lead them to fulfill an obedience of faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ and remain faithful to Him throughout their lives.

### **Secondary Series Aim:**

Students will have greater knowledge of Jehovah God's laws, teachings and commands so that they may have a full, clear and correct understanding of His workings, plans, and purposes in the world and in their lives.

### **Lesson Two Aim:**

Students will have a Bible-based knowledge regarding topics current to the human experience on which God has given specific direction: personal/public opinion, science/theology and political correctness.

### **Suggested Lesson Format:**

First Session (30 minutes)

Reading

Discussion

Questions

Second Session (30 minutes)

Review

Testing

Crafts

## **The Great Barrier Reef: Beautiful but Dangerous**

Just off the coast of Eastern Australia lies a section of sea named the “Great Barrier Reef.” According to the Australian government, it is the “largest living structure on the planet.” It encompasses approximately 244,000 square miles of ocean. Statistics about it include:

- It is the largest coral reef ecosystem.
- It includes some 300 coral reefs, 600 continental islands, 300 coral cays and about 150 in-shore mangrove islands.
- It is between 60 and 250 kilometers in width (about 37 to about 155 miles). [1]

Within its blue and green waters is a huge and diverse variety of marine life. However, some of it is extremely dangerous: poisonous sea snakes, several kinds of jellyfish, stonefish (which, if stepped on, inject a lethal toxin from a barb into the victim), cone fish, the deadly blue-ringed octopus, sting rays, sharks and crocodiles make it their home. So while it is definitely pleasing to see and observe underwater, divers and swimmers have to be very careful where they go and when, being alert for signs of danger that may not be easily seen. The outward appearance can be deceptively dangerous, if for no other reason than on the surface, and even beneath the crystal waters, everything seems to exist together in perfect harmony. If you want to dive or swim there, you must adjust to its realities or you may not get out alive.

## **The Desire to Always Fit In: The Real Danger**

Group thinking is like that. There is a “herd instinct” built into all of us; the desire to fit in with everyone else. Nobody really wants to be viewed as an outcast, and there are not many who want to be viewed as a “loner.” This makes us all, to some extent, try hard to look like everyone else, talk like everyone else, act like everyone else, dress like everyone else, etc. Being the last person chosen for a game of softball, basketball or volleyball; not being cheered by the crowd when your name is called at special school events; left behind when everyone else takes off as a group, etc. leaves one feeling alone, unimportant, and unloved. Therefore human beings will do all kinds of things to follow and imitate the crowd even when they are doing something they personally dislike doing.

God made us all as individuals with minds of our own. The only thing He has ever asked of us is to be like Him in all our ways. God tells us what He wants from us: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8, NKJV).

God allows us to have our own personality, likes and dislikes, but calls us to His moral perfection and goodness. If we live pleasing Him, we will usually wind up not following the crowd, not conforming to its self-centeredness. That can make us unpopular with them and may even cause us to lose favor with the “crowd.” We must decide which we want the most, and which of the two we intend to please, for we cannot please both at the same time.

## Memory Verse for Today

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”*

Romans 12:2a

## Lesson Introduction

During the time of the Judges Israel (the people of God) had no king. Because of that, and because their leadership was not what it should have been, they lost their way. The attitude which led to their bad behavior and idol worship was summed up as: *“...everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 17:6b). This period lasted for more than a hundred years, possibly several hundred depending on sources and their chronology. After being enslaved and oppressed off and on due to their unfaithfulness to God, they at last demanded a king for themselves. They did not want Samuel’s sons and heirs to rule over them (1 Samuel 8:1-5). They told Samuel, *“and they said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations’”* (1 Samuel 8:5). This made Samuel unhappy but it also displeased the LORD: *“And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods— so they are doing to you also ’”* (1 Samuel 8:7, 8).

You can see their desire to conform to (become like) those nations that existed around them, all of which had kings. It was a bad idea for many reasons, not the least of which is because they wanted a human ruler and overseer, with his own weaknesses and faults, instead of the LORD Almighty who is perfect and powerful. It was a fatal mistake that led to the downfall of their nation.

## Science and Theology (Religion) on the Origins of Life

Science is the pursuit of knowledge, factual knowledge. It involves procedures which are supposed to develop into, or lead to, conclusions. There must be precise and accurate tests and measurements for anything to be concretely stated concerning whatever is under examination. This often requires a re-creation of events that unerringly allow a scientist to arrive at a correct conclusion. If these tests cannot be made precisely or duplicated exactly in a laboratory, then the only recourse is to establish a ‘theory’ about something. A theory is not the same as an exact, factual, truth. Such is the Theory of Evolution.

For many hundreds of years people believed that living things could grow from non-living things. They believed in what is now called ‘spontaneous generation.’ This is explained as: *“the hypothetical process by which living organisms develop from nonliving matter; also, the archaic theory that utilized this process to explain the origin of life.”*<sup>[2]</sup> This belief persisted for hundreds of years contradicting the Biblical record of the origin of life. It was accepted as fact, just like evolution is today.

It was not until the famous scientist, Louis Pasteur, in the 19th century using the scientific method, proved conclusively that such a thing is not true. He may have done this in part by seeking to disprove Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and the origins of life published in the book, *On the Origin of Species*. If he did not, Pasteur, as a scientist, still established the absolute fact that living things do not evolve or appear from non-living things. This is important when anyone is discussing the origins of life on this planet and its beginnings.

So why the conflict between science and theology? Many things could be said, but the words of the famed atheist Aldous Huxley, "*The reason we accepted Darwinism even without proof is because we didn't want God to interfere with our sexual mores!*"<sup>[3]</sup> 'Mores' (MOHR-ays) used in this sense means "moral attitudes."<sup>[4]</sup> In other words, many people, including scientists, prefer to enjoy the freedom of sexual expression (and all forms of self-expression for that matter) as *they* would have it, not as *God* would have it. While that is not true of every scientist or person who believes in evolution, it does help many who do not believe in God to have a suitable alternative to religion, most especially Christianity, as a way to order their lives.

The theory of evolution expressed in Darwinism has long since taken root in the school systems across our nation and the world. It is being taught as fact, not theory as it should be if it is to be taught at all. Those who oversee and regulate public education will not permit Biblical 'Creationism' (as told in *Genesis*) to be taught in the classroom any longer. If you are a student at any level, Elementary, Middle School, High School, and College, it will be eventually be required of you to accept, if not believe, that the world and everything in it evolved from nothing. If you conform to this, you will be accepted by your peers. If not, you will be deemed an outcast and worse. The question will always be: will we conform to it or not?

## Popular Opinion

Very few people in the world desire to be looked upon by most others as outsiders, "kooks," "weirdos" or oddballs. The urge to fit in with the crowd is powerful. Thus, while people may have their own personal opinions or beliefs about something controversial, many will not admit them or "confess" them to others. Instead they will go along with the crowd to avoid being labeled and marginalized. This may do for some things, but it will not do for those professing Christ and Christianity. We will have to accept the fact that this WILL happen to us if not always, at least on some occasions.

The early Christians knew how it felt to be viewed as outsiders, outcasts, rebels, and even atheists. The government of Rome during the centuries after Christ (and even before) demanded that their king, the Emperor of Rome, be viewed and worshipped as a god. They were "deified." For Christians to claim "Jesus is Lord" meant denying that "Caesar is Lord." This made trouble for them and the early church. Christians were harassed, persecuted, robbed, tortured and murdered for their beliefs for being "atheists" (for not believing in the divinity of Caesar!). Many accepted their lot and died for their faith in Christ. Jesus had told them: "*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10).

The Apostle Peter said this: *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified”* (1 Peter 4:12). It was expected that Christians would suffer for their faith. Jesus had said this before His crucifixion: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also...These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service”* (John 15:18-20; 16:2, 3). As long as Christians do what God expects them to do as revealed in His Word, the New Testament for the present Age, then we will always be swimming against the tide of popular opinion. We must decide who it is we want to please, God or people? If we conform to popular opinion, when it goes against the current way of thought on any subject, we will neither be transformed nor help transform others into the image of God in Christ Jesus.

### **Political Correctness**

No one who has a normal, rational, sane mind wants to inflict pain on other people, either physical or mental (emotional), Christians above all. Yet even Jesus Christ had to say some frightening things to people of His day, and us also, as warnings to keep worse things from happening (Matthew 23:14, 33; Mark 3:28, 29). ‘Political Correctness’ is the current way we are told to behave in society: we are told not to use certain words, phrases, modes of expression, religious ideas, etc., that are considered insensitive or which may offend the sensibilities of others. To do so on some levels now constitutes “hate speech.” Strangely enough, the ones who scream “intolerance” the loudest are the very ones who are intolerant of the rights of others.

The truth is, we do not need human wisdom to define what we should or should not say or what we should or should not do. The Word of God takes care of that. The easiest measure of any speech or action should first be filtered through the Golden Rule: *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). Do you and I want to be warned of danger to our souls? Surely! Then do not hesitate to warn others of the danger to theirs. Do you and I want to help people avoid temptation, sin, evil and wrongdoing, while guiding them into the Light of God’s moral perfection? Then we must help others in the same way. This does not mean we treat others with contempt. That must never happen. Yet it does mean we will say and do whatever we know is right according to the commandments and teaching of the Word of God in the New Testament, our Guide for this, the Christian, Age.

We must not fear what people may do to us as a result but let us not be childish. If we speak the Word of God to people seeking to turn them from sin and toward the Lord Jesus Christ, some, maybe many, will be offended. They will be tempted to treat us shamefully just as Jesus was treated. We will have to decide where we stand. Will we say nothing, and conform to “political correctness” or will we be bold and stand with our Lord? The choice is ours.

## Questions for Review

Instructions: Choose the *best* answer from those provided.

1. Why should we beware of trying to fit in, or conform, to the world around us?  
 a. We should try to fit in or else we will be unhappy in life.  
 b. The world is “passing away” but spiritual things of God will remain forever.  
 c. It is more fun to be independent thinkers.
  
2. What sentence best sums up the behavior of the Israelites during the time of the Judges?  
 a. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.  
 b. Everyone followed whatever god they chose.  
 c. Everyone listened to the wrong people.
  
3. Why did the Israelites want a king for themselves?  
 a. Samuel was old and they wanted someone new.  
 b. They hated God and wanted Him out of their lives.  
 c. They wanted to be like all the nations around them.
  
4. Why can the Theory of Evolution never be conclusively proved?  
 a. It can be proved and has been for a long time.  
 b. Radiocarbon dating is not flawless and can affect the evidence.  
 c. It is scientific fact that something cannot evolve from nothing.
  
5. What is the greatest danger of trying to conform to popular opinion?  
 a. We might be tempted to compromise our faith in Christ and/or our religious beliefs.  
 b. We might not be treated fairly by others especially as we get older.  
 c. We might find out they all were wrong.
  
6. What is wrong with always trying to be “politically correct”?  
 a. We may not say what we would like to say to them.  
 b. We may be looked at as someone who has no mind of our own.  
 c. We may hold back saying something others need to hear for their own good.

## Conclusion

Like the Great Barrier Reef, whose clear waters reflect sunshine on the waves of its surface and a teeming host of life beneath, we might be fooled into thinking all is calm, peaceful and uniformly beautiful. If we dive in, we will soon learn our mistake if we are not careful. Likewise, what seems good in society can actually be harmful instead. When we try to do as others do, be what they are, we could easily be leading ourselves, and them, away from God and His Word. We might be giving approval to things that He does not. Remember the early Christians, how they suffered for their faith. Their faith in God, even to the point of death, enabled them to change the world for its own good. That will not happen if we seek only to conform to it.

*Thank you for your participation!*

## Exit Question

*What in this lesson impressed you the most, or may be something you just learned, or something you will share with others who need to know?*

## Sources

[1] <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/about-the-reef/facts-about-the-great-barrier-reef>; <http://www.livescience.com/6290-great-barrier-reef.html>; <http://www.barrierreefaustralia.com/the-great-barrier-reef/reef-dangers.htm>

[2] <http://www.britannica.com/science/spontaneous-generation>).

[3] <http://www.wordofgodtoday.com/quotes-def/>

[4] <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mores>