

Kip McKean's Theology: Still Winning in the Cincinnati Church of Christ

By a former member of the Cincinnati Church of Christ.

First Edition - July 4, 2011

July 4, 2006

Five years ago today, at the former Borders book store in Deerfield Township, I was first given permission to think.

July 4, 2011

Today, the fruit of that day is still being harvested.

Today, I play the Left Bauer.

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Introduction

“Hey these are the studies with commentary. My campus ministry leader sent it to me.”

I didn't believe it at first. This campus intern at the Cincinnati Church of Christ not only sent me a copy of their new bible study series from their campus minister, but she included commentary as well! I was only interested in seeing just the new study series itself. I had familiarized myself with the ubiquitous First Principles (sometimes known as Guard the Gospel) series written (but discovered later to be mostly plagiarized) by former World Missions Evangelist of the International Churches of Christ, Kip McKean. This study series was used to bring people into the control of a fast-growing (from the inside perspective), worldwide cult for almost a quarter of a century. However, times have changed. McKean was kicked out of the ICOC and started another movement called the International Christian Churches. His churches still use First Principles. This left the remaining ICOC churches, who don't have a clear, unifying leader discipling them from the top down, with the choice to stay with First Principles¹ or devise another study series.

The Purpose of This Paper

Since I was given this new study text with commentary firsthand, I decided to see how it compared to the original First Principles to see what had changed.

Some may see this as an attack on the ICOC, the Cincinnati Church of Christ, or even its leadership and members. The only true enemies are Satan and his hordes of demons, who helped invent and crystalize the false gospel presented in First Principles. I offer only a defense of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. If it can be shown that this new study series is not significantly different from First Principles in several key areas, it should put people on alert.

My Target Audience

The people I want to reach with the dissemination and analysis of this study are primarily pastors, preachers, teachers, elders, ministers, and other Christian leaders. They need to know what the ICOC teaches so that they can effectively minister to the former members. I'm especially concerned about getting this into the hands of Christian leaders involved in college ministries, since the campus ministry has historically been and continues to be the fundamental engine that drives the ICOC congregations. Former members and families and friends of current members will also find this paper helpful. I'm surprised about how many former members – and some include ministers who are leading churches filled with Christians who don't understand their pastor's background – haven't fully figured out that First Principles is a false, works-based

¹ One of the more influential ICOC congregations at the time of this writing, Hampton Roads (Virginia), lead by longtime movement leader Mike Fontenot, still uses First Principles. (<http://hamptonroadchurch.org/?q=node/106>)

gospel that teaches a different Jesus Christ than the One revealed in the scriptures. I hope this can close the gap of understanding.

I know that current ICOC members, especially those from the Cincinnati Church of Christ will read this paper. I both know and accept that the vast majority of them may believe or will believe that this is an act of persecution against a former member who is bitter (which is usually one of the first adjectives they will use to describe critics) and seeking revenge (I have nothing to gain personally). One of the most difficult things in recovering from my eight years as a member of the ICOC (from 1998 through 2006) was dealing with half-truths. I'm utterly convinced that half-truths are much more powerful weapons in the hands of Satan than lies. During my time in the church, the members of the Cincinnati Church of Christ and the entire ICOC were drowning in a sea of half-truths. A healthy study series that differs itself from First Principles and the half-truths it presents would be a welcome step forward in recovery.

A specific part of the ICOC who may get a lot out of this analysis are the youth. At this time in the movement's four decade history, practically all the disciples who are college-aged and younger never experienced the events of 2003. Additionally, many on campus are Kingdom Kids (they were born and raised in the ICOC). Their only picture of Jesus Christ presented to them most of their lives (at least through their childhood) was the one handed down by their parents and church culture: the false Messiah of First Principles.

As Paul feels about his fellow Israelites who have rejected Christ in Romans chapter 9, I feel about the men, women, and children who are still utterly absorbed and dependent on the ICOC system of control by codependence. After leaving in 2006, I came across a different Jesus the ICOC presented me: a Jesus who wasn't controlling or demanded perfection, but who called to me by His grace to follow. I certainly hope and continue to pray that some who read this will make the decision to leave the ICOC and cleave to a healthy church body where the full gospel of Jesus Christ of both truth and grace is taught and lived. However, I don't expect many to take the risk to take the red pill and unplug from the Matrix.

Prerequisite Knowledge

A knowledgeable understanding of how the teachings of First Principles differs from orthodox, historical Christianity requires the understanding of the history and development of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement in the 19th century, the development of the "mainline" Churches of Christ in the 20th century, and the discipling movement in the "mainline" Churches of Christ in the late 20th century, including the Crossroads Campus Ministry Movement, the Boston Movement, and the ICOC until late 2002 when Kip McKean resigned as the leader of the movement. However, since the target audience may not have a background in these areas, I'm going to simplify the summary of First Principles in order for the average, Bible-believing Christian to understand.

In short, First Principles teaches another gospel where the person being converted must adhere to an arbitrary list of works given to them by ICOC leaders to first become saved and then to remain saved. This makes it just one of many remixes of the Galatian heresy that has plagued the Church for two millennia. In addition, any false gospel must have a different Jesus Christ worshipped as Savior and Lord. It will take a mountain of writing to explain the Jesus Kip McKean has concocted to match the teachings in First Principles.² However, since we're dealing with a works-based gospel, a Jesus of a works-based gospel expects his disciples to earn their salvation and keep working to hold onto it. The steps to become a "true disciple" or Christian in the First Principles system are:

To be saved, a **lost person** must perform these steps in this order:

- I. One must accept the ICOC's interpretation of the Bible as the ultimate priority for their lives and it cannot be questioned.
- II. One must agree that the ICOC's methods of discipling – which neglect the Holy Spirit – are mandatory for salvation.
- III. One must confess **all** of their sin to ICOC members leading their studies.
- IV. One must repent, not only in their hearts and minds, but by their deeds as well using the sins they confessed as a baseline of repentance.
- V. One must accept ICOC's teachings of Jesus's character that differ from historical Christianity that ultimately make Him more human than divine instead of preserving and underscoring His dual nature as the God-man.
- VI. One must start living the life as a "disciple" as the ICOC defines it.
- VII. Finally, one can only have a valid baptism after all of these previous steps have been completed to the satisfaction of the local ICOC's leadership.

This so-called gospel is unique in Christendom. The Jesus who emerges from these studies commands perfect obedience, even from a lost person hopelessly trapped in their brokenness and trespasses, to access grace and mercy. This is clearly and unquestionably a false Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not by obedience through perfection by discipling.

Assumptions

First, I'm going to assume that there's a fictitious person who is going through all the studies: the "potential convert". This person has heard of God and Jesus, but has grown up "unchurched" with little exposure to the Bible or the Church. Second, I'm going to

² Briefly, "Kip's Jesus" wasn't completely divine during his time on earth. He remained sinless on his own willpower and effort without the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, this diminishes the role of sin into something that can be controlled and eliminated. This is done through an authoritarian discipling system. This also presents sin in a vein strikingly similar to the heresy of Pelagianism (or at least semi-Pelagianism). See ICOC teacher Doug Jacoby support core tenants of Pelagianism at http://www.douglasjacoby.com/view_article.php?ID=6133. This Jesus was also not completely sovereign over his death and resurrection. This contradicts at least John 10:17-18. This helps compile guilt on the convert when the ICOC presents the cross, death, and sacrifice of Christ to them.

assume that the potential convert is being studied with in a group setting with two or more members of the ICOC. The potential convert is the only person in the group who's not a member. All the people in the study are the same gender as well. Third, I'm going to assume that the beliefs and practices the potential convert agrees to and follows are the same ones that current members both agree to and practice as well. This also covers the spectrum of people from people who have some kind of profession of faith in Christ all the way up to Christians who are solid in their faith and knowledge of the Bible and want to join the church. In the latter cases, parts of the studies where the Christian's beliefs match up with the studies would be skipped. I believe all of these are fair assumptions given the ICOC's historical practices.

How the Study Text Is Presented

Since the text was given to me unformatted (and with some misspellings and grammatical errors, particularly with the notes from the leadership), I applied logical formatting to separate each study, each page of the study, and the enumerated points. I also underlined the scripture references and put titles of sections and subsections in boldface. The rest of the text remains as-is. In some places it's difficult to tell whether the text is part of the study or notes. Obviously it appears that parts of the study text itself are either in a late draft form or have been transcribed. However, the message it conveys is still clear.

I will also refer to the classic First Principles studies by name. They mostly correspond with the seven steps of salvation presented above:

- I. The Word of God. (a.k.a. "The Word" study)
- II. The Coming of the Kingdom. (a.k.a. "The Kingdom" study)
- III. Discipleship.
- IV. The Cross.
- V. Light and Darkness (covers the topics of sin, confession, and repentance).
- VI. New Testament Conversion (a.k.a. "The Baptism" study)
- VII. The Church.
- VIII. Counting the Cost. (This study is usually not written down or covered to most members when taught in group settings. It's done right before a convert is baptized to make sure they're "on board" with everything and to make sure they're locked in.)

The study text and ICOC commentary will be presented with dashed boxes around it.

My commentary on studies will be outside of the dashed boxes.

Study Series A

Apparently the (working) title of the new study series is Study Series A. Here's the introduction for the study leader leading the potential convert to Christ:

Goal to study the bible: fall in love with God!

1. See God! There are many pictures of God! Share with them how much I love God! (it needs to be so obvious emotionally that I love God! If they don't see it then they won't see God)

The individual studies in the original First Principles are structured around key topics. A key change to this study series is attempting to structure the topics around God and love. This series is more emotional and appeals to the senses much more than First Principles. However, we'll see many of the scriptures and applications as we work through the studies.

This softer, emotional appeal may work better to attract the Millennial generation.

2. Absolute truth- significance of God's word! Do not argue with Gods truth! He's right, were wrong!
3. Apply the study to them! (huge step)
4. Follow the application. With a lot of love and encouragement; don't confront just the action, confront also the emotions, the heart, and mind. - if I am not careful I may baptize someone because of knowledge but not love!

It's up to the leaders of the study to ensure that the potential convert submits their entire heart, mind, soul, and strength to the direction of the leader, not to God. It's the entire responsibility of the leader to make sure that the convert accepts Christ not just in an intellectual assent, but the lost person must show "love". It was clear in the original First Principles series that the Holy Spirit was not part of the process. Is the Holy Spirit a part of this process in this new study series? We'll discover the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion later in one of the studies.

God's Love For Us! – Study #1

1. God came down to us through Jesus.

Read John 1:1-18. Who is being called “the Word”? (verse: 1,14)

A: jesus

(exalt god! He is above all, he was before time, he created the world)

What came through Jesus Christ? (verse 17)

A: grace and truth

(talk about what grace really is, that God loves them. Use stories. Second start, forgiveness)

(he brought truth, everyone claims to have the truth. Only one truth. God will bring the truth on life.)

- 1a. Examples of how God has loved us through Jesus. Jesus touched all types of people.

(do not go through all these examples)

John 8:1-11 woman caught in adultery

(beautiful picture of how god views us, treats us & loves us; have u ever felt persecuted from the world; god wants everyone to be responsible for their own sin; jesus didn't condemn her but helped her. Did she know what she was doing wrong. God came to fix us; the world condemns us)

John 13: 1-15 Jesus washes the disciples feet

Luke 5: 12-13 Leper

Mark 10: 17-27 rich young ruler

So far, so good.

2. God reached out to us through Jesus.

Read I John 4:9-10. How did God show his love to us?

(god sent jesus to us! He wants something with us, he is reaching out to us through Jesus; what u send makes a huge statement on how u view the recipient; god wants to give us a life beyond what we have; He loves us even though we didn't love him; how do u feel when u get a great gift from someone?) (\$1 compared to \$100)

Is a Christian indebted to God or was the debt paid at the cross and the Christian has other motivation? Unfortunately, as the ICOC commentary implies, scripture twisting is used to prove their point.

3. God sacrificed Jesus for us.

Read Romans 5: 6-8.

(god is amazing and god is in love and is really active)
(what does it mean 'when we were powerless'? Divorce, relationships, messed up people)

What kind of people were we when Jesus died for us?

A: messed up people! People who dont have it all together, the ungodly, the powerless.

(Romans 3:23- were all messed up. Jesus was sent to all of us so we can have a relationship with us. In order to do so he had to die for us)

Read: I Peter 2:21-25 (verse: 24) What did Jesus do for us on the tree?

A: bore our sins

(he took my sin, your sin, your failures, he put it on himself; the result of that: we wounded him and therefore he healed us. He took responsibility for our failures. That's a friend)

Note that we are powerless because of our sin and this point is emphasized by the ICOC study leaders! Keep this point in mind as the studies progress.

4. God desires a relationship with us through Jesus.

Read John 3:16-17

(when we love something we plan, we think about, we dream about, we do anything to have)

(god is really in love! With u and me, his creation; but b/c we are sinful and messed up and so he gave to us, his son, not to condemn us but to save us.)

Q: what do you own? \$1? Car? Son of God?

Why was Jesus sent into this world?

A: for us to have eternal life.

(God is doing a lot here for you? Why can't you make time for God?)

Again, the idea of indebtedness is hit upon. It's clear to see that guilt is also being introduced at this point for the potential convert to feel like they have to do something for God. This is especially underscored by the commentary: "Why can't you make time for God?"

Read John 17: 1-3 (verse 3) What is the definition of eternal life?

A: to know God, to have a relationship with him. God doesn't want someone to follow a list of rules and regulations. He wants us to love him. Going to church and doing all the things is an overflow of our love for god. But if u don't have a relationship then it becomes a chore)

Note that eternal life is an intimate (knowing) relationship to the Father through the Son. It's through who the Father gave the Son (verse 2), which we have no control over. As emphasized through the leader's notes, it's not "a list of rules and regulations". Remember this point as well.

5. God speaks to us through Jesus.

Read (I read this) Hebrews 1:1-3. Who is he? Describe the Son in this passage.

(we don't usually pay attention for the nobodys in life. We do pay attention to the somebodys or the famous, & rich persons; God is amazing and awesome, he is smarter than anyone; he more of a somebody than anyone else. And he wants a relationship with)

A: a personal communication to you. He is communicating that He is a lover and wants to love u. Elevate God. If u have no relationship u have no inheritance. Everything created will be given to Jesus. Jesus is the exact representation of God, we can know god through the son. Radiance! He is writing u a letter and that letter is Jesus! Creator of the universe wants to be your friend!

There are shades of John 5:39-40 being communicated here. It's not about the scriptures it's to Whom the scriptures testify: Jesus.

Read II Timothy 3: 16-17 List the purposes of the Scriptures:
(to teach us- to know Jesus, know love, know the relationship, who god really is)
(correcting- Our view of who god is and how he views us)

Read I Thessalonians 2:13 Is the Bible the word of God or of men?

(got to accept gods bible as a message from him; make a decision and take these notes, go through them and remember that god is telling u he loves u and you are important; prayer before & after. Ask this question: will u accept the bible as Gods word. And will u let the bible apply it to your life. Read the bible everyday and write down everything u see where god loves us)

The original Word study in First Principles is distilled in this point. Nothing about men's traditions verses the Word of God is covered here, like Matthew 15:1-9. Although the person being studied with must *implicitly* accept all the traditions presented to them as they progress through the studies. When anyone or any group claims to go solely "by the Bible" for their faith and practice, there are always traditions involved. The key is to question whether the traditions are healthy or not.

The summary of the first study is a mixed bag. On one hand, the ideas that we're powerless because of our sin and God desires a relationship and not a list of rules are enforced. Jesus is lifted up. On the other hand, ideas of indebtedness and guilt are presented as well.

Our Love For God! – Study #2

Q: do you really believe that God loves you?
(commend them for their faith)

Notice that the ICOC study leaders provide explicit reenforcement to the person being studied with. Historically, this has been done to build their trust so they will agree with what they're going to be taught in the study.

Read Matthew 22:34-40. The greatest commandment is to love God. Let's look at some ways we can love God according to the Bible.

Q: what does love look like?
Break down mind, body, soul, and strength

The first scripture that's presented in this study is a command. However, in the previous study the ICOC study leaders said that it was about a relationship instead of rules and regulations. In the historical ICOC context, this scripture may be the start of a "bait-and-switch" where obedience through a relationship with Jesus is substituted with obedience to an impossible standard of perfection.

1. Seek Him.

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14. The context is when the nation of Israel was in Babylonian captivity and promised a return to her home country. God's promise was to the nation, but it represents his desires to bless all of mankind. (Verse 13)
(How does it feel that god wants to prosper you, he wants to protected you. What is our part?)

(what does it mean to seek?)

Seek = love/relationship

Q:how do you find God?

A: when you seek with all your heart

What is the promise if we seek God?

Read Acts 17:24-27 speaks of where God placed the nations. (Verse 27) What was the purpose of God's activity in this passage?

(Gods involved in our lives so we can have an opportunity to find him)

("perhaps"-choice/free will)

In this point, the idea is presented that salvation is something that is up to the person that needs to be saved instead of being balanced with the desire of God who is working to save someone undeserving of salvation.

2. Believe Him.

Read Hebrews 11:6. Who gets rewarded?
(what does that mean to be rewarded by God? Are you ever late to class or work?)

Again, the idea is that effort and onus is on the individual to be right with God and earn rewards is enforced.

Read John 6:28-29. What are the works God requires of man?

The basic answer is “to believe in Jesus”. In context (John 6:25-59), Jesus discloses to the crowd that He is the bread of life. The Jews grumble against Him because they can’t accept His teaching. Why not? The Father hasn’t drawn them to the Son! (verse 44) Clearly, pure human will, logic, and desire on its own can’t produce the faith needed to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. It’s obvious that God has a hand in it too.

This faulty interpretation of works was inherited from some in the “mainline” Churches of Christ, particularly in the view that baptism is a necessary work done in faith by the convert to have their sins forgiven. If baptism and works are going to be associated together with salvation, it must be seen as God doing the work since God does all the works of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

3. Follow Him.

Read Mark 1:14-18. What is a fisher of men?

(We have an invitation from God to "come". God wants to invite us into a lifelong friendship and discipleship. We can't live without God, he calls us to follow him to get us through life.)

(If we love God we have to seek him, believe in him, and follow him!)

Read Luke 9:23-26. What is self-denial?

(self-denial=love)

Read Luke 14:25-33. What does one have to give up to follow Jesus? Why?

1. Priority of relationship (hate mom & dad) ie: marriage: primary love for wife, 2nd parents.
2. Estimate the cost- takes two to tangle, both parts have to be engaged. Are you willing?
3. What's it worth? It's the most important thing. It's the most valuable. That's why we'd give up everything to have it!

These are three classic scriptures from the "Discipleship" study from First Principles. I would be very, very surprised if much time wasn't spent on this section and imported traditions from the classic "Discipleship" study, such as the "Disciple" = "Christian" = "Saved" equality. This faulty formula is used to convince the person being studied with that if they're not doing everything a "Disciple" does (according to the ICOC study leaders), they're not a "Christian" and therefore aren't "Saved".

4. Obey Him.

Read John 14:23-24 and I John 5:3. What does our obedience equate to God?

(if you pull the relationship out of it then it's a command but when you have the relationship it's love!) (if someone disobeys then what does it say about the relationship?)

(our love is active when we obey)

Read I John 2:3-6. Who is called a liar in this passage?

This point unfortunately proves a point made with the first scripture referenced in this study: obedience through a relationship with Jesus is substituted with obedience to an impossible standard of perfection. We all cannot perfectly obey God's commands 100%, all the time! We are all "liars" since we can't meet this standard of perfection! Most important of all, no one can truly love God! Any attempt to meet such a standard of perfection is utterly futile and ends up in legalism, which ultimately chokes out any chance of an authentic relationship.

5. Worship Him.

Read Romans 12:1-2. What are the spiritual acts of worship?
(what's gods mercy?) mercy = love (first study)
Offer yourself= love

Read Hebrews 10: 19-25. Our relationship with God starts between God and us and then expands to the fellowship. What is our duty to other Christians?
(not self-contained. Relationship with God is a relationship with his family of believers and with those he wants in his family)

Worship by offering our bodies as living sacrifices as the beginning of Romans 12 calls Christians to do is pointless unless the Christian understands the gist of the previous eleven chapters! Sin was pointed out in earlier scriptures used in the book of Romans, but the idea of grace through faith was skipped. Without this critical piece of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the self-sacrifice will be totally self-powered, self-determined, and self-directed.

It's correct that this study points out that there are no "Lone Ranger" Christians, but there is a clear balance in the scriptures between an individual Christian's reliance on both the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been left out of the studies so far.

6. Example of a seeker of God.

Read Acts 8:26-39. How does this man show each of the above points about seeking God?

(now take this study and pray before you go over all of it, pray after. Will you obey and love God back? If yes, between now and the next study note the ways you seek him, believe him, follow him, obey, and worship him)

The encounter and conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch is presented. An explicit comparison between what the Eunuch does with how the potential convert has responded to God in the past using the scriptures covered in this study will likely take place. Historically, the person being studied with will always lose. This is also where the doctrine of baptism will likely be introduced, which is the "end zone" for conversion.

The main idea of this study is reflected by the ICOC commentary: "Will you obey and love God back?" Since guilt and indebtedness were introduced in the previous study, and this study focused on obedience, the path to works-righteousness has been illuminated. However, none of the classic works First Principles required for salvation have been clearly (but perhaps implicitly) presented yet.

A Mutual Love (Part I) – Study #3

In order to really understand the depths of God's love, we have to first understand the depth of man's problem.

Looking forward a bit, this two-part study is a rehash of the original First Principles study "Light and Darkness". It introduces the ICOC ideas of sin, confession, and repentance. This study could either make or break whether converts are required to perform similar works the First Principles series does to become a Christian.

A. Sin Is Our Problem.

1. Read I John 1:5-2:6.

What is darkness represent?

(sin separates us from people or God; it will hurt it, damage it)

(verse 7) What purifies us from sin?

(verse 9) Why must we confess our sins?

(have to be honest to ourselves and to God)

(verse 8 and 2:4) What are the two ways we can lie about ourselves?

Notice that in order for the truth to be in someone, to have a right relationship with God, one must not claim to be without sin and obey His commands. Is it a contradiction to both admit sin and obey God's commandments? No, it's impossible for us to completely cease sinning while living in cursed bodies, cursed minds, cursed consciences, in a cursed world. However, we start to see that the ICOC's definition of sin is a list of "dos" and "do nots", which contradicts a key point in the first study that a relationship with God isn't a list of rules and regulations.

2. Read I Peter 2:9-10.

List the description of those in the light.

(we need the light; most of our activities are in the light)

What is the description of those in the darkness?

(Christianity is good!)

3. Read II Timothy 3:1-5.

(verse 5) What do you think it means to have a “form of godliness but denying it's power”?

(someone who knows the bible, goes to church, prays but isn't really different. They have a form but really not tapping into the whole power of God!)

This section is one of three scriptures (the other two are the next two points in the study) used in the past to “break” the person being studied with. Unfortunately it's usually not the Holy Spirit convicting them of sin (John 16:8), but the study leaders ganging up on the convert and bullying them into guilt.

This is also where the people leading the study may start criticizing “religious” people. (Sometimes there are instances where religious people need to be criticized!) However, practically everyone who claims to be a Christian is a target to be marked as “religious”.

Here's a question to ask the study leaders: how does a Christian accept godly power? Odds are the Holy Spirit won't be part of the answer!

4. Read Galatians 5:19-21.

Paul says that the acts of the sinful nature are obvious. What are the obvious sins in your own life?

(verse 21) What is Paul's warning?

Historically, this is where the person being studied with spends the most time confessing sin to the study leaders. Great pressure from the leaders is put upon the potential convert to extract as much detail as possible, especially about sexual sins. Historically, these confessions have in the past been passed around through the church's leadership and any other discipling partners the potential convert will have. This isn't surprising since every member is expected to display “openness” and “transparency” when it comes to their personal sin.

5. Read I Corinthians 6:9-11.

Who will not inherit the kingdom of God?

(verse 11) What is the solution to the problem of sin?

(getting washed; god has a way to fix it; how does it make u feel?)

(what's it look like to be washed: it's valuable again; justifies: never happened)

other scriptures: John 3:19; Isaiah 59:1-2

After the potential convert has been sufficiently broken, the “end zone” of baptism is presented, quite possibly for the second time.

6. Read James 4:17.
In what other ways do we sin?

The ICOC's idea of sin has properly pointed out sins of omission (as this point illustrates) and sins of commission, but fail to utterly point out, as evangelicals Charles Spurgeon and John MacArthur among many others do, the "sinfulness of sin". Sin has corrupted our minds, hearts, souls, bodies, and the world around us to the point where it can't be fixed. Any attempts to fix it by either ignoring it or glossing over it ends in emotionalism and licentiousness. Any attempt to fix it by imposing rules to "do better" ends up in legalism.

It's also important to note at this point that even though the Churches of Christ have been historically Armenian (as opposed to Calvinistic) when dealing with free will and sin, the historic ICOC treads into the heresy of Pelagianism. The classic First Principles studies cite Ezekiel 18:20 in their weak and inconsistent claim that denies the existence of original sin (our consistent inward tendency to rebel against a perfect and holy God, Matthew 15:17-20). Therefore, since people don't inherit a sinful nature from Adam, the limit of sin's corruption is isolated to making good and bad choices. Again, the ICOC's idea of sin is merely disobeying a list of commandments – "dos" and "do nots". These commands can therefore be managed through human choice, human will, and human accountability through discipling. God, specifically the Holy Spirit, isn't needed! (Although Christ's death on the cross is still necessary to pay the penalty for sin.)

We have looked at the sins that destroy our relationship with God. As you look at these sins, which give you your greatest struggles?

(make a list that u committed; put a 1 next the sins that are still going on now, 2 next to the ones that are pretty easy to deal with and 3 next to the ones thy have done before but havent done it in a while.)

** (meet in the next few days)

Begin with looking at sin list that most likely isn't complete.

Sin's thoroughly and irreversibly corrupting nature makes it impossible for us to completely and utterly point out and confess all of our sin. In this "new" study series, the ICOC, by requiring a potential convert to write a complete "sin list" (and expect that their list isn't complete by the time they do their next study) proves beyond a doubt that they expect lost people to "perfectly" confess all of their sins. However, since it can never be truly perfect, perfection is measured by the ICOC's study leaders if enough sin and details of sin were confessed. Note that this fact enforces the view that these beliefs and practices of sin and confession *remain the same as the ICOC before the reforms of 2003*.

Note that the “sin list” is examined before “Part B” of this study is started.

B. God’s Love Is Our Solution.

1. Read Romans 5: 6-8.

Describe the persons Christ died for?

(how do u feel when you sin? Christ is paying a tab here for us because he loves us; he sees we messed up and knows we need to be fixed/rescued)

How does God demonstrate his love for us?

Does sin always result in bad or “yucky” feelings? Our “sin detector” can’t just lie with our emotions or conscience because although they’re useful, they’re corrupted by sin and don’t work flawlessly all the time.

2. Read Ephesians 2: 1-10. How does the Scripture describe us in verses 1-3? A: dead; objects of wrath)

(verse 4-5) What makes us alive when we were dead?

What is your definition of grace from this passage?

A: god raising us up from a condemned life to a awesome life!

Verses 8-10 are widely ignored. The definition of a “work” is a deed someone does to demonstrate their character. God’s works are always good and please Him by definition. The works of Satan are the opposite, but they display his fallen, wicked, twisted, evil character. Verses 8-10 describe three kinds of works: works men do apart from Christ (which are worthless), works of salvation God does (which are always affective and please God), and works done by the saved which are done through Christ’s inherited righteousness. The third way is the only way our works can please God. They have no affect on our salvation, but are a result of it.

At this point, clearly what is being presented is a false, works-based gospel that is lining up with the teachings of the traditional First Principles study series. By requiring a lost person to write a “sin list” done to the approval and standards of the ICOC study leaders, it turns the gospel into a worthless work done to please God.

Since this requirement for salvation was not dropped, points made in all the studies to this point that were labeled as historical may now be interpreted to still be current practice.

3. Read II Corinthians 5: 14-21. (verse 14-15) What compels us?
(he wants us to be the recipient of his grace and mercy?)

(how difficult was it to work on your sin list? You're motivation is that god really loves you)

Considering the fact that the leaders probably berated the person being studied with for not doing their "sin list" good enough for their satisfaction, they likely feel an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame. This is where the leaders would build up the potential convert so they would feel entrusted to them for exposing their sin.

What are we to do in response to His love? A: we don't live for ourselves but for him
(god doesn't command us; there is a love appeal; he pays the tab in hopes that we respond. It's driven by love.)

It appears that God has done everything in His power to save the potential convert. It's up to their own power and efforts (which have already been proven to be woefully insufficient) to respond!

(isn't your sin list a representation of how selfish you are and how you want to live)

The tables are turned on the person being studied with. More guilt and shame are being piled on. (This sequence of alternating praise and rebuke is a typical technique to wear people down and follow the instructions given to them by the party who is starting to control them.)

(verse 17) What does it mean to be a new creation?

(start over; recreate; stop the way we have been living because we have fallen in love with him; get rid of the old; live based on what God wants)

(verse 20) What does an ambassador do?

(represents; in a foreign land; god wants us to be with him; talk about heaven; stands up for our country/God!)

(verse 21) How do we become the righteousness of God?

A: god made him who had no sin to be sin for us; in what Jesus has done we become righteous/forgiven/new creation

Read the crucifixion account in Matthew 26-28. How does what you've learned in this study help you "personalize" what Jesus did for you

Suggest watching the movie "The Passion".

This is the summary of the traditional First Principles study, "The Cross". The "personalization" sets the potential convert to play the role of all the sinners in the account. The amount of guilt and shame put upon them, in conjunction with their "sin list", further wears them down.

In the past, a medical account of Jesus's passion was read. However, since this study appears to be focused more on the visually stimulated Millennial generation, the movie "The Passion of the Christ" is substituted. (Sometimes, the old ICOC movie "The Cross" is substituted. It's a similar version of "The Passion", but shorter. The ironic part is the executive producer of that movie was none other than Kip McKean!)

Summarize: we have totally messed up; don't be afraid; don't hide or lie about it. Our part is to figure out our sin.

If one does not identify death and sin they will have no urgency to want to be alive!

The potential convert will be called to "be open" about everything in their lives. By surrendering this to the ICOC study leaders, they have surrendered complete control over to them and not to Christ. They are also called to "be urgent". At this, the lowest emotional point in the study series, the potential convert is pointed to the hoops they must jump through to be right with God.

A Mutual Love Study Part II – Study #4

(Review and consider where the person is at.)

So where *is* the person at? At this stage, they've been completely broken down, so it's implicitly obvious that they've been convinced (perhaps falsely) by the ICOC study leaders that they're lost and going to hell. They've accepted the ICOC's interpretation of the Bible as their standard and worked hard to confess as much sin as they could. In addition, they've accepted several of the key traditional ICOC doctrines, including their interpretation of discipleship.

(repentance is not salvation. See how they are feeling about sin)

Repentance hasn't even been discussed in the studies yet!

(it's important that I talk about God's love here especially after them looking at their sin)

Now that they're quite susceptible to the ICOC's control, their confidence can be rebuilt by rebuilding them on their system.

God's love is demonstrated to us in the cross. God wants the closest relationship possible with each of us. From a human analogy that would be a marriage, and amazingly, the Bible uses this exact terminology in describing our relationship with Him.

Spiritual Marriage

1. Read II Corinthians 11:2.

If Christ is the husband, then what are we? A: the bride

(God is perfectly going to love his bride; his church and you)

The Bible refers to the church as the bride of Christ. We enter into this spiritual marriage when we become Christians. The Bible gives us specific direction how to enter into this relationship.

2. Read Ephesians 5:22-33.

This is a passage about human marriage but also about our spiritual marriage to Christ. (Verse 24) Who submits to whom?

A: the wife submits to the husband and the husband will oversee. Notice how many times we see the word love. Submit can seem a negative term but in the view of this loving relationship it is not negative.

Q: what areas do you need to submit to God? (out of love)

Answer: everything on the convert's sin list.

(Verse 29) Who feeds and cares for the church?
(all your life you have tried to "feed" and "provide" and "care for yourself (spiritually) but see where that got you. Now God wants to take care of you)

Unfortunately the ultimate feeder and provider will be through the ICOC's discipling system and not God.

(Verse 31-32) ...and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery –but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Submission, sustenance, and unity are all a part of our relationship with Christ.

(just like a wedding there's some prep work that needs to be done before the two becoming one.)

How much “prep work”? If we go back to the example of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch, it appears that he didn't have much “prep work”. No mention in the account is him doing a “sin list” for Philip.

3. Read Acts 2:22-24, 36-41.

(who nailed Jesus to the cross?)

(how did they respond to the cross)

(you are a murderer! Did you write that on your sin list? Do you understand that you are responsible for the death of Jesus)

What is confirmed in the commentary is despicable. One of the most controlling tools the ICOC system has is convincing that every member is personally and fully culpable for the crucifixion of Jesus. In the book of Acts, we see Peter and Paul's preaching that keeps the focus on the people directly responsible for the crucifixion to the Jews. Acts 2:36 and Acts 4:10 place the blame on the Jews and in the latter case, the Sanhedrin and other Jewish religious leaders. Later in Acts 10:39, Peter tells the gentile Cornelius that "they" – the Jews in Jerusalem – killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. Cornelius (and all gentiles) are held responsible for their sin and its consequences, but not for the direct crucifixion and death of the Messiah.

When these people came to understand the cross and who Jesus was, they asked the apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?" In preparing to respond similarly, let's take a closer look at the subjects of repentance and baptism.

(these people realized what they did and the enormity of their guilt. They wanted to be released of this guilt)

(in order to have a relationship with god we must repent and be baptized)

The Jews in Acts 2 wanted to be released of their guilt, but maybe not as badly as the potential convert feels at this point.

Repentance

1. Read Romans 2:4. What leads you toward repentance?

(how so?)

2. Read Titus 2:11-14.

(what is the grace of God: Jesus dying on the cross)

God's grace as the undeserved favor of God is much, much, much, more than "Jesus dying on the cross".

What does God's grace teach us to say "No" to? A: the things on your sin list.

Q: how do you say no?

What should we be eager to do?

A: repentance is not just saying no to what is wrong but also an eagerness to do what is good as well.

(what would be good to do?)

3. Read II Corinthians 7:10-11. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow?

(just feeling sorry doesn't mean you changed.)

What does godly sorrow produce in a person?

(there's a production of something in you, and it's clear)

(if knew Jesus was coming tonight how eager would u be to change?)

4. Read Acts 26:20. What did Paul preach?

A: prove repentance by your deeds.

Are you ready to repent?

All of these scriptures are building to the ultimate point that repentance as the ICOC describes it, is not just turning away from sin, but action. The problem is that the potential convert is still lost and dead in their sins! So if they are eager to do what is right, showing signs of true godly sorrow, they why must they prove their repentance by their deeds? As seen previously in Ephesians 2:8-10, a lost person can't do works to please God. Repenting by looking at your "sin list" and fixing it on your own power and abilities is utterly useless! It may have worked for Earl on the TV show "My Name Is Earl", but it's not scriptural, biblical, or Christian.

At this point, the clear teaching of a lost person repenting by their deeds and proving it (likely by using their "sin list" as a base line) is both another traditional First Principles teaching and a heresy. This is another supporting pillar in their gospel of works that practically no other Christian group teaches.

A Mutual Love Study Part II – Page 2

Baptism

(baptism should be a celebration. Like a wedding and saying vows)

1. Read Galatians 3:26-27.

How are we clothed with Christ?

(When God looks at you what does he see? How about when we are clothes into Christ?)

2. Read Romans 6:1-7.

What is crucified in our baptism?

(don't choke your sin; kill your sin)

(Verse 4) After our burial in baptism, what are we raised to live?

(we deserve to die! But when Christ dies in our behalf we no longer have to die if we are in Christ.)

It's important to make two important key distinctions at this point in the ICOC's study on baptism. First, the "mainline" Churches of Christ (from which the ICOC inherited its theology) and other denominational groups (Christian Churches, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox) believe that baptism is the *normal* point where ones sins are forgiven and they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³ Most other denominations and fellowships comprising of Evangelical Protestantism believe the *normal* point where ones sins are forgiven and they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is at the point of placing their faith in Christ. Even though these camps don't agree on the timing, they acknowledge that the key is someone placing their faith into Jesus Christ. The more conservative "mainline" Churches of Christ took things a step further by saying that baptism is *required* for salvation and one step beyond that, saying that one must believe that their sins are being forgiven at the point of baptism for the baptism (and forgiveness of sins) to be valid. The ICOC (as we'll see below) will take it even one step further than that!

³ Even though many in the "mainline" Churches of Christ may say and believe that baptism is *required* for salvation, when further questioned about it, they will agree it's a timing and cognizance (what the person knows at the time of baptism) issue.

Second, the ICOC ultimately sets up baptism as a straw man argument. All the defenses to the gospel in the First Principles study “New Testament Conversion” deal with getting baptism “correct”. None deal with getting other doctrines (confession, repentance, discipleship) or even the person and work of Jesus Christ correct! The ICOC doctrines surrounding baptism must be circumvented and the focus must be placed on the errors of the doctrines leading up to baptism, specifically those concerning Jesus himself.

Let's see an example of this:

3. Read Acts 16:25-34.

From reading the text, about what time of day did the jailer and his family get baptized?

(paint a comprehensive picture of conversion. This guys life is sinful and got put in a life and death situation. He heard the good news from Paul and Silas and he knows he is not saved. You have to believe! Did this guy believe? His faith, no one else's. Is he saved yet? No! Then he gets taught, repentance by addressing their wounds that he has inflicted on Paul and Silas. Then baptized. Where are you at?)

This is the account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family.

The commentary clearly paints the picture of the traditional ICOC conversion taught in First Principles. The emphasis is not putting his faith in Jesus Christ, but on his baptism and getting his baptism “correct”.

Notice that “he gets taught”. If this teaching can happen in a few hours during night, then why are these studies taking so long? Did he and his family have to make “sin lists” the potential convert did earlier?

Also notice that this passage is twisted to supposedly prove the ICOC teaching of repenting by showing it by your deeds while still lost.

What does the urgency of the family to be baptized say about this teaching?

The fires are stoked in the potential convert to get baptized. The ICOC study leaders have all the power now since they control when the potential convert is ready for it.

(Verse 34) From reading the text, what actions and decisions are included in “coming to believe in God”?

This is where the “plan of salvation” becomes clearer: hearing the message, placing faith in Jesus, confessing (all of your) sin, repenting of sin and proving it by your deeds, then being baptized.⁴ Works are required and baptism becomes a work a lost person does to earn grace and salvation.

4. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. How does this passage describe a person before becoming a Christian?

A: dead, objects of wrath.

(right now you're dead! Do you believe that? What does that mean? Make sure they say that they are going to hell)

If the bad news hasn't been given to the potential convert yet, it is here! Note that verses 8-10, which totally contradict what has just been taught concerning works, is included. The study leaders are to emphasize that the person they're studying with is going to hell. (So why hold up baptism any longer?)

This also brings up the general idea of who outside of the ICOC is truly saved? Apparently if someone gets to this point of the studies, they haven't either confessed enough sin, repented by their deeds enough, or have had misunderstandings of what knowledge is required (in the ICOC's eyes) for their baptism to count.

Remember that one of the assumptions made near the beginning of this paper was that this study series is the baseline for doctrine and practice for not only our potential convert who didn't have a Christian background, but also other strong, experienced, growing Christians and ICOC members as well. This practically diffuses ICOC claims that there are other “true disciples” outside of their churches and dismisses it as lip service. Conversely, it shows that Christians outside of the ICOC should know that ICOC members believe that they're not genuinely saved. (So the Christians should take the proper precautions and show them what *true* grace is!)

(Verse 4, 8) What motivates God to reach out and save us?

Note that verse 8 is pulled in to try to pull grace into the picture. However, it's impossible since the potential convert needs to do works so they can get to salvation!

⁴ At this point, what has been taught about salvation practically mirrors the seven steps highlighted in the introduction. Although the step about accepting a false Jesus is implicitly taught and reenforced when the potential convert is walked through the Cross at the end of the “A Mutual Love (Part I)” study.

Recap:

Do u see gods love?

Do u love God?

Will u own your sin?

Where are you right now?

What do you need to do?

The study leaders push for a decision to continue the studies and go towards the end zone – baptism. The potential convert doesn't really have a way out at this point under the frame work that has been constructed around them in the studies taken so far.

Note that baptism – and salvation – is withheld until the potential convert completes their “sin list” and “proves their repentance by their deeds”. In addition, they must agree with the other major points covered in the studies so far and to come. All are part of a coherent system of belief the potential convert must agree to in order for their baptism to be valid in the ICOC's eyes.

In Love Forever with God and His Children: – Study #5

Let's look at the basic principles of responding to God's love after we enter that special relationship with him.

Since the ICOC study leaders have the potential convert cornered by withholding baptism, the remainder of the studies will be their list of what is to be expected of them. It's like a legal contract with severe repercussions (such as the loss of salvation, the loss of relationships with other "true disciples") if the potential convert breaks it.

1. Love One Another.

A. Read John 13:34-35.

The old command was love your neighbor as yourself. The new command is to love like Jesus did. How did Jesus love people?

Q: what is the way you show love to people?

(this isn't a romantic love but a sacrificial love. He commands us because this is a difficult thing to do. To love God who is perfect is one thing but to love imperfect people is a whole other thing especially when you're tired, stressed, etc.)

B. Read I John 3:14-20.

What are the qualities of love described here- positive and negative.

(to lay down your life is love! What does it look like to lay down your life for someone? The testimony that someone is a disciple is through their love. It's a lifestyle. Helping people move; giving people rides; buying someone lunch. These are all ways we express our love for one another.)

Loving one-another is all of these things, but under the power of the Holy Spirit (which hasn't been brought up yet in the formal study notes) and not under compulsion, which has been the historical behavior of the ICOC.

2. Relationships and Roles in the Body.

A. Read I Corinthians 12: 12-27.

(verse 13) How many Spirits and how many bodies are there?

(they all don't have the same function or responsibility. God has designed different parts of the body. The world highlights the "beautiful" parts of the body like the face or hair. But what about you pinky toe? But when god looks at the body where does he put the most value. The body only functions well if were all together. Were only as strong as our weakest link. People like the handicap, women who are obese, old, young, black or white. We have to engage with all parts of the body. That's how Gods body works)

(verse 26) "If one part , every part with it; if one part is , every part with it."

(we celebrate together but we also mourn together. We are all one! Are you willing to be that?)

Dates, the kingdom, etc

The ICOC study leaders will likely emphasize the idea of "one body". Since they're the only group of Christians who practice the mandatory list of prerequisites for salvation, then they must be the only true Church!

Historically, the body of the ICOC has been dysfunctional and once inside and close up, doesn't look like the body of Christ.

Note that two other ideas are mentioned at the end: dating and "the kingdom". Historically, dating and marriage have been strictly controlled by the ICOC. Members aren't allowed to marry or even "go steady" without the leadership's permission. What appears to be assistance to help pure and God-honoring dating relationships sprout and grow ends up with arranged marriages by the leadership that are built around obeying the leadership instead of a true, self-sacrificial Christian marriage.

The "Kingdom" in ICOC terminology has always meant to be a reference to the Church. This was another doctrine inherited by the legalistic "mainline" Churches of Christ. It ignores the deeper meaning of the kingdom of God as described in the scriptures as the rule and reign of Christ in the hearts of his people and its advancement and full coming at His second coming. "The Kingdom" is used to marginalize other churches, denominations, and fellowships and is used to breed the "one true church" mentality.

B. Read Romans 12:3-13. (verses 6-8) List some of the different gifts God has given people to use in serve to him in his church.

(verse 10) What does it mean to honor one another above yourselves?

Selflessness is portrayed by the ICOC study leaders not as the opposite of selfishness, but utterly losing oneself to the point of becoming a doormat to others and to leadership. Selflessness in this case becomes self-hatred and keeps the person in a constant state of defeat and dependency on the system.

It's noteworthy that this particular list of gifts are used. None of the gifts would be classified as miraculous, such as those found in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30. Christians have debated over whether the miraculous gifts are for Christians today. The point I want to underscore is that both the miraculous and non-miraculous gifts are supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit. The ICOC doctrine of the Holy Spirit will finally be presented in this particular study, but as far as what has been presented so far, the potential convert's gifts are solely to be used under their own will power.

C. Read Hebrews 3:12-13. How does sin and unbelief affect your relationship with God?

(this passage says that we "see to it". It means it has to happen. See to it what? That we help people with their sin. We encourage people to not sin. How do we do that?)

(we can lose the relationship that we gained if we do not do this. Encouragement puts vision and gives strength to deal with their sin. In order to do this we need to spend regular communicative time together. Look at us, in the past few weeks/ months we have been walking with each consistently to help one another.)

(this is happening with you from us and it needs to happen with others from you)

What is the solution in this passage?

As covered previously, the Holy Spirit has a role in convicting Christians of sin as well. The idea presented here is pure codependency. By persuading the potential convert to have daily contact through some form with other church members and coming to all the scheduled events (in some cases, people had to quit their jobs to make meetings, not just Sunday morning worship), the ICOC monopolizes their time. The members hold each other accountable to "not sin" through the discipling relationships and historically have gossiped and passed confidential information about sin to other leaders.

D. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. (verses 24-25) What is the purpose of meeting together with the church?

(Bible talks; midweeks; church; retreats; conferences. This seems easy at times but when our lives get busy and we aren't doing well we sometimes need to be spurred to meet together. It's important that we're around the body so that we can get spurred, refreshed, encouraged, strengthened, and built up. When you stop meeting together what happens?)

(romans passage says we belong to one another. This needs to be a commitment you make as a disciple. John 13:34 says you know you're a disciple by this kind of unbinding love.)

This point just reemphasizes the previous point. The only way to “get spurred, refreshed, encouraged, strengthened, and built up” is by attending *every* meeting. This is clearly control by the ICOC over its members. Circling back to John 13:34 closes the loop and emphasizes these points made in this study so far. This study is practically no different from the traditional First Principles study “The Church”.

In Love Forever with God and His Children. – Page 2

3. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

A. Read Ephesians 1:13-14.

What is described as a seal and a deposit in this passage?

Finally we arrive at the ICOC doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, it's heretically lacking. Note that the Holy Spirit is described as a "What" instead of a "Who". The Holy Spirit has been utterly depersonalized in ICOC theology. The **only** role that "it" has mentioned in the entire study series is to be a seal and deposit for salvation.

Celtic peoples have constructed a metaphor of the roles and works of the Holy Spirit to a wild goose. By comparison, the ICOC calls "it" the stuffed head of a nine-point buck that is hung over their fireplaces after their baptism.

Consequently, since the Holy Spirit is not a Person in ICOC theology, the ICOC is *non-Trinitarian*.

Galatians 5:22

If the Holy Spirit is just the seal and deposit for salvation, who produces the fruit of the Spirit in the ICOC theology? The members! This is like asking a turnip to produce blood.

B. Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

(verse 16) What is the source of power to live the Christian life?

(Why do we need this kind of power that comes from the Spirit? He will do immeasurably more and more as we tap into this Spirit.)

Again, the words "what" and "this" are used to describe the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seems to be being separated from the rest of the Trinity as just "God's spirit"!

4. **Heaven Bound.**

1. Read John 14:1-4.

What is Jesus saying he will do for us in this passage?

2. Read II Corinthians 4:16-18.

What are the key principles in this passage that enable us to “fix our eyes on the unseen” things of eternity?

(there are times when we lost heart. Our outside pressures will increase and bad times will come. But our problems are light compared to what is unseen-heaven.

3. Read II Timothy 4:7-8.

What would make us long for his appearing?

Finish the race!

Now that the potential convert has gone through most of the gauntlet, heaven is presented. The commentary notes indicate that the subject of persecution may be brought up in this section. By finishing up on a positive note, the potential convert is being prepared for the final study and baptism.

Counting the Cost

This is the final study. The now “almost a convert” is quizzed by the ICOC leadership to ensure they understand that they’re lost and understand all the prerequisites for their salvation for their baptism to count. Note that full, published, public versions of “Counting the Cost” are rare.

1. Believe in God

Look carefully at the Jesus presented in this study series. Is this Jesus *truly* the God of the Bible as presented by healthy, orthodox, historical Christianity? Does the person and work of this Jesus match up?

2. Build a relationship with God that continues to grow

These are typically the two classic ICOC spiritual disciplines. First, having a daily “quiet time” (typically done first thing in the morning) where the disciple is motivated for the entire day. Second, having a dedicated daily prayer time and praying throughout the day so the disciple continues to be motivated. These spiritual disciplines are very good on face value, but are typically mishandled by the authoritarian discipling process. If someone has a “flat” quiet time or prayer time, they’re usually rebuked and made to feel guilty for neglecting God.

3. To disciple, be disciplined, and make disciples

Daily participation in the ultimately authoritarian (because the role of the Holy Spirit has been superseded by another person) ICOC discipling system is mandatory. Dedicated discipling times have been admittedly lax since 2003 (relative to Kip McKean’s new ICC as well), but from external observations, it appears to be making a comeback. Note that the traditional focus on these three relational aspects is “be disciplined”. The constant and primary focus of an individual disciple is to have a “Paul”. (Other aspects such as having a “Barnabas” as a peer and “Timothy” to disciple aren’t emphasized as much.) Also, “make disciples” implies daily evangelism, mostly through cold contact sharing.

In 1987, Kip McKean introduced an implied addition to First Principles known now as “disciple’s baptism”. It states that someone had to “become a disciple” before their baptism was considered valid. (This means that someone had to become a Christian before they could become a Christian!) This will likely have been introduced earlier in this study series so it could be checked here by the ICOC leadership in the “Counting the Cost” study.

4. Deal with sin, hate sin, repentance of sin

The most important aspect of the discipling system is to master sin by “not sinning”. Although the potential convert’s sins are about ready to be washed away in baptism and never be seen again (Psalm 103:12), the “sin list” has been historically used and passed around to other ICOC leaders and other ICOC churches to make members comply if they get out of line. God may forget sin, but the discipling system doesn’t!

5. Commitment to body

Parts of the last study and other miscellaneous items fall into this last point. The potential convert will be at every meeting of the church body, submit their finances to the church, submit their dating and marriage life to the church, submit their parenting to the church, and so on. This will likely be tailored to the individual as well, especially areas that they “struggle” with.

After this final study, the potential convert becomes a real convert when they’re baptized! However, what really happens in the eyes of God? Will their works-righteousness save them? Will the gospel of First Principles save them?

Additionally, what happens later on when they inevitably fall into sin and don’t live up to the high standards set for them right before their baptism?

Conclusion

Comparison to First Principles.

Someone who is familiar with First Principles can easily see that this is just a remix of the original study series. All the core doctrines are present. All the traps are laid for the unprepared potential convert to fall into and admit they're lost and going to hell until they comply. All the expectations placed on the lost convert are present. Significant changes haven't been made to the traditional core ICOC theology.

A Better Study Series?

The most noticeable changes between Study Series A and First Principles is the former's attempts to meld in God's love and grace. However, an eye to detail can see the obvious contradictions between grace being taught in one verse followed by works in the next. In short, this may do more harm than good from the ICOC perspective. One very sneaky aspect of First Principles was not explicitly attaching grace until either the person being studied with asked about or the leaders attaching it to salvation near the end. Attempts by other ICOC churches to create a "kinder, gentler" version of First Principles in the last several years have failed and most have gone back to using First Principles. The ultimate goal of the ICOC's system is numerical growth, and First Principles, when taught using the systemic ICOC traditions, produces baptisms.⁵

What Does This Mean?

Since Study Series A doesn't differ on the fundamental and essential points of First Principles and consequently the fundamental and essential points of ICOC salvation doctrine, it's can be concluded that the reforms of 2003 haven't taken hold. This means that all ICOC churches that either use First Principles or a close remix of it (like the this particular congregation does) are practicing the same toxic and cultic doctrines that they have been teaching for decades. Nothing has changed. Consequently, **no** ICOC church has provided a solid doctrinal direction that doesn't specifically exclude other Christian groups. Fundamentally, they believe that they're still the "One True Church".

This also implies that people inside of the cult and those being brought in are still being spiritually, psychologically, sociologically, and mentally abused. Although few people have come forward in the last few years with their stories of abuse after the "reforms" of

⁵ In 1995, elder Al Baird (a very high-level leader then) noted that there were 30,000 people baptized and 20,000 people who had left the church in the calendar year 1994. (<http://www.cultwatch.com/iccquotes1.html>) Therefore, to add a member that would count for church growth in 1994, it would take three baptisms! This is why many baptisms are so important; they hide the fact that many leave the organization as well. It's also important to note that since 1994, the ICOC hasn't had a better ratio of people joining to people leaving than 3:2 across the movement as a whole. However, there are isolated pockets where the ratio is better than 3:2 at the time of this writing.

2003, there's no doubt that the same dynamics are still in place and the potential for abuse remains very high.

This also means that certain aspects that are promoted by the church as both unique and positive, such as high percentage of the congregation that is engaged in church activities, giving of time and financial recourse, and other measurements of participation don't mean anything. In addition, the diversity of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (along with geographic diversity in the city they meet in) doesn't mean anything either⁶.

How Do You Know Someone Is a Christian?

Christians aren't called to judge each other's salvation experiences; they're called to test life and doctrine considering the revelation of the Word of God with grace. On face value, the Jesus Christ taught by Study Series A, like the one in the traditional First Principles is **not** the Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible or taught by healthy Christians through the centuries, but another among the many works-righteousness frauds invented with the help of creative men, women, and demons through the millennia. So are ICOC members saved? Clearly if an individual member has put their faith into this false gospel instead of the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ, then they're lost. However, this is typically quite difficult to prove! The New Testament teaches that we are to judge what it taught by church leaders, test it by the Word of God, and hold them accountable if they're wrong (Acts 17:11, 1 Timothy 1:3-7).

Heresy typically isn't reached in day. It develops over time. Tracing the current ICOC's history back through the original Boston and Crossroads Movements and back further through the Churches of Christ⁷ reveals that heresy crept in and pounced at certain points of time. The practice of works-salvation in the original Boston Church of Christ

⁶ The congregations that compose the ICOC churches in the Atlanta, Georgia area have had significant problems dealing with racial tensions between their individual congregations. Wasn't discipling supposed to ensure this wouldn't happen? (<http://xray342radio.blogspot.com/2011/01/discipling-fails-to-fix-racial-issues.html>)

⁷ The ICOC's roots can be traced directly to the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement of the early 1800s. Over the next two centuries, the movement split into three mostly discernible groups. The first are the Disciples of Christ, who are almost exclusively liberal and resemble other large, mainstream Protestant denominations. The second are the Christian Churches. They are mostly theologically moderate, holding to both unity to other Christian denominations on the basics of the Christian faith and holding to a conservative interpretation of the Bible. They resemble other independent, evangelical churches. The third are the Churches of Christ. They are typically more conservative than the Christian Churches, although in many cases the only noticeable difference between the two is that the Christian Churches use instruments in worship and the Churches of Christ don't! This is true for "progressive" Churches of Christ that recognize and work with other Christian denominations. However, there is a group of legalistic Churches of Christ that only recognize themselves as the true Church. (There is a shrinking number of Christian Churches that fall into this camp too.) The Church of Christ that started the original discipling/campus ministry movement in 1967 in Gainesville, Florida was a legalistic Church of Christ that condemned other congregations for using instruments in worship. This group eventually evolved into the ICOC. So although on the surface, an ICOC congregation may look like a Christian Church, under the hood, their theology is much, much closely related to the legalistic Churches of Christ.

was clear when the original First Principles was written and was fully imposed in 1987 when Kip McKean declared the doctrine of “disciple’s baptism”. The vast majority of people in the ICOC today were converted using the original First Principles and many were baptized again after “disciple’s baptism” was introduced.

No one except the individual ICOC member (or ex-member) can truly know if they have placed their faith in the authentic Jesus instead of the abusive Jesus painted by the ICOC. Unfortunately, it takes separation, time, and a large investment into soul searching to determine if they had truly accepted Christ or not, especially if they had not before meeting the ICOC.

For example, the author of this paper was a “cultural Christian” (specifically a “cultural Catholic”) before he met the ICOC in the fall of 1998. He “studied the bible”⁸ for almost three weeks before he was baptized. However, he had not placed his faith in Christ. He, like many others before and after him, placed his faith in his own works to save him. He went into the baptistry lost, separated from God, and headed towards hell and came out of the baptistry *still* lost, *still* separated from God, and *still* headed towards hell, now at a much faster pace than before!

It was not until six months after leaving the cult, finding a healthy body of believers, counseling, and sorting through the half-truths that were fed to him for eight years did he realize that the Jesus he knew in the ICOC was **not** the authentic, historical, perfect, grace-filled Jesus of true Christianity. Specifically, his life was **not** being transformed into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was being molded and guided by behaviors given to him by other influences: people, institutions, society, and what the ICOC told him to do. He was still trying to live up to an impossible standard, and until then, thought that the ICOC’s standards would ultimately justify him before God on the day of judgement because he “did what the Bible said to do”. Unfortunately, he still didn’t know the One the scriptures testify to. (John 5:39-40).

So on Sunday, May 6, 2007⁹, the author of this paper walked forward at the end of the worship service and publicly confessed Jesus as the Son of God, both Lord and Christ. He knew he was overcome by his sin and was powerless to provide any remedy for it. He knew the cost he was going to pay to follow Christ, although he did not know His gentle yoke. A few minutes later, he was baptized into Christ. Since then, he’s known the true grace of God and knows the Father through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Under the same influence of one of the men who met and converted Kip McKean in the original Campus Ministry Movement, Sam Laing, at the Triangle Church of Christ in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina.

⁹ This was the same date that Kip McKean started the City of Angels International Christian Church, in Los Angeles, California. This became the global hub for his new “Sold-Out Discipling Movement” or “International Christian Churches”.

Is It Like This In All ICOC Congregations?

Even though Study Series A is being used in (at least) one ICOC congregation, it brings up the question of if similar claims can be made with other ICOC congregations. Given the history of the ICOC in terms of uniformity and control, in addition to the fact that the vast majority of ICOC congregations have agreed to join a new overarching church governance structure (<http://www.icocco-op.org/>) beginning in 2006, and many of those ICOC churches are using First Principles or a slight derivative (as “derivative” as Study Series A in this paper has been), it’s more than likely that the “One True Church” mindset and exclusive requirements for salvation are still in place. However, this may be difficult to prove in all cases, especially for churches that are not part of the new “Cooperation” group. Therefore, great care must be taken by Christians and Christian leaders in a given city to ensure what their local ICOC teaches. It’s also important to note that at this time, no ICOC church has publicly recognized and refuted the core teachings of First Principles. Many in the ICOC may be unknowingly operating under significant cognitive dissonance by attempting to add grace back to the works-righteousness gospel of First Principles.

What Can Be Done?

Since nothing appreciable has changed in this congregation, Christians, Christian leaders, and ministries need to be on guard and go back to viewing the ICOC as was done before 2003. It’s not another church. It’s not a zealous group of Christians. It’s a full-fledged psychological, sociological, and theological Christian cult.

That being said, in the past, some Christians and Christian groups have dismissed the ICOC as a well-meaning, but misguided and overzealous group. However, due to the analysis in this paper, it’s undeniably clear that they preach a different gospel and different Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should be seen at least as dangerous as other mainstream Christian cults such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) or the Jehovah’s Witnesses (Watchtower Society). In certain arenas, such as college campuses, they should be seen as even **more** dangerous, perhaps the or one of the most dangerous groups on campus because of their recruitment techniques. The life blood of the ICOC are campus students, for they form the backbone of future leadership of the congregations and provide families who will stay there for the long-term. At this point in the cult’s history, we’re starting to see these long-term families who were products of campus ministry conversions in the 1970s through the early 1990s have *their own* children on college campuses, just like their parents! Special care must be taken with these “Kingdom Kids” since they were born and raised in the cult and likely have little or no picture of the person and nature of Jesus Christ other than the one they grew up with in the cult. (This is contrasted to their parents who may have come from a mainstream Christian background.)

When meeting and dealing with its members, Jude 22-23 must be taken into account. The vast majority will need to be shown mercy and concern, since they’re in spiritual blindness and probably won’t believe it at first. Those who are leadership also need

mercy, but need to be dealt with sternly and directly, focusing on the demonic doctrines they peddle. Over all, interactions need to be treated with much grace. Their salvation is likely at stake!

Also, we Christians must fervently pray not only for the protection of the innocent people who will come across this group, but also for the victims involved: from the leader at the top all the way down to the people in the rank and file who have been there the longest. The illusion was shattered and many people were freed in 2003 and since the dynamics are back in place, **it will happen again!**

Thank You

Thanks to the people who have read these drafts and have helped me communicate the message that I intend to get across. You have been helpful in my recovery and I express my deepest gratitude to you all.

For more information and comments, e-mail me at xray342radio@gmail.com. I'll attempt to return all e-mails I receive. More information can be found at:

<http://xray342radio.blogspot.com/>

<http://forums.delphiforums.com/ICCdiscussion/>

<http://www.reveal.org/>

<http://www.spiritualpornography.com/>¹⁰

¹⁰ No, "spiritual pornography" has nothing to do with real pornography. This site was formerly kipmckean dot com, until the owner was threatened with a lawsuit unless she surrendered the domain name. There's a full explanation of the history behind this term on the web site. Yes, it's kid-safe, but maybe not "Kingdom Kid" safe!