

S T U D Y G U I D E

# Christian Worldview

R.C. Sproul



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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# Introduction

R.C. demonstrates that there is a real antithesis between the Christian view of the world and the way the secularist views his world. He shows how Christianity touches life at the point of ethical decision, values, art, literature, and education. Listed below are the titles of each lecture.

1. Secularism
2. Existentialism
3. Humanism
4. Pragmatism
5. Positivism
6. Pluralism and Relativism
7. Hedonism
8. Science
9. Economics
10. Government
11. Art
12. Literature

The following outlines are intended to be used as learning aids. Because they are to accompany the actual audio presentation, they do not attempt to duplicate what is said point to point. Rather, the outline is designed to aid the student in keeping track of Dr. Sproul's development of his topic and by reviewing in summary form what he has presented.

# Secularism

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the dominant schools of thought in our culture.
2. To get an overview of these philosophies.

## OUTLINE

- I. All believers are missionaries in their own countries.
  - a. Though we distinguish between laity and clergy, every Christian is a missionary.
  - b. Missionaries must know the language and the culture of the alien society, as well as Bible content.
  - c. America cannot be assumed to be a predominantly Christian culture.
    - i. We live in a secular environment, a post-Christian phenomenon.
    - ii. We do not live in a monolithic culture.
  - d. A Christian needs to be aware of the dominant system operating in his culture.
  - e. There are six schools of thought operating in our society today:
    - i. Existentialism
    - ii. Humanism
    - iii. Pragmatism
    - iv. Positivism
    - v. Pluralism
    - vi. Hedonism
- II. The one word that incorporates all the dominant philosophies is secularism.
  - a. An “ism” is a school of thought, a philosophy, a worldview.
  - b. The word *secular* comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning *world*.
  - c. *Secularism* is the idea that all of life must be judged by today’s values.

III. The Bible concerns itself with long-range considerations.

- a. God Himself is timeless, eternal.
- b. God looks at everything from an eternal perspective.
- c. The Christian is called to live his life in light of eternity.
- d. What you do has eternal significance.
- e. The secularist's motto is: **RIGHT NOW ONLY COUNTS RIGHT NOW.**
  - i. Philosophers call this the "philosophy of the here and now."
  - ii. This removes any eternal purpose from man or existence.
  - iii. We see this all around us, particularly in advertising.
  - iv. This is ultimately a philosophy of despair.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the church is adequately addressing the culture? Why or why not?
2. What are some evidences that America is not a predominately Christian culture?
3. Can you give examples from Scripture which speak of "eternal significance"?
4. How does secularism run counter to the teachings of Jesus?

## 2

# Existentialism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the history and meaning of existentialism.
2. To point out the ways in which an existential culture conflicts with Christian principles.

### OUTLINE

- I. No philosophical system has affected 20th century America as has existentialism.
  - a. Everyone encounters the influence of existentialism every day and in every area of life.
  - b. Existentialism has grown so rapidly because its proponents have been brilliant and gifted men, such as Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.
  - c. It deals not with abstract theories of knowledge but focuses on human existence.
- II. Existentialism began in the 19th century with theistic and atheistic varieties.
  - a. Its impact was felt in America after World War II.
    - i. The destruction of the war moved many to despair about humanity.
    - ii. The artist colonies, like Greenwich Village, communicated some of the basic concepts in their art.
    - iii. The film industry and the theater furthered these motifs.
  - b. This is a movement away from rationality toward irrationality.
- III. The main idea of existentialism is that “existence precedes essence.”
  - a. The individual counts, not the group.
  - b. The only valid conclusions come from one’s individual experience.
  - c. Man lives in this dimension only.
  - d. There are several major themes in existentialism.
    - i. There is nothingness. Nihilism proclaims that there is not meaning to human experience.
    - ii. There is despair and dread, which Hollywood films exploit.

- iii. Another theme is “angst” or anxiety—the undefined, faceless feeling inside of oneself. Martin Heidegger wrote *Being and Time*, which describes man as being thrown into the world.
- iv. There is the theme of freedom and autonomy in which there are no norms because there are no absolutes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is it about existentialism that appeals to modern man?
2. What aspects of our culture have provided fertile ground for the growth of existentialism?
3. What are the symptoms of a culture infected with existentialism?
4. Answer the claims of existentialism with themes from Christianity:
  - a. Individuality
  - b. Experience
  - c. One-dimensional man
  - d. Nothingness
  - e. Despair
  - f. Anxiety
  - g. Autonomy

# 3

## Humanism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To examine the content, background, and influence of humanism.

### OUTLINE

- I. Humanism is an ancient philosophy and has undergone numerous changes.
  - a. It is not to be confused with humanitarianism.
  - b. Its beginnings lie in ancient Greece. Protagoras said, “*Homo mensura*,” or “Man is the measure.”
    - i. Man becomes his own standard.
    - ii. Man is the ultimate being, ultimate authority, and ultimate reality: *Anthropocentric*.
  - c. Where humanism is man-centered, Christianity is God-centered: *Theocentric*.
  - d. Forms of humanism have acknowledged God’s existence but limited His power.
  - e. Denying the supernatural, humanism is a conscious alternative to Christianity.
    - i. Erasmus was a 16th century humanist.
    - ii. He is considered the Prince of Renaissance humanism.
  - f. To the humanist, religion is just part of your human experience.
- II. In the 16th century, Christianity prevailed over humanism.
  - a. The Enlightenment, in the 18th century, saw the tide turn.
  - b. The 19th century saw humanism and theology combined into “liberalism.”
    - i. If humanism denies the supernatural, and then is combined with Christianity, liberalism is the only logical conclusion.
    - ii. Emil Brunner, a neo-orthodox theologian, called liberalism “unbelief.”

iii. Liberalism caused a shift from personal redemption to “social gospel.”

III. There is a militancy in some humanists toward Christianity.

- a. Dewey believed that religion hinders the progress of man.
- b. Humanism believes in changing the world through education.

IV. There is an obvious struggle between Christianity and humanism.

- a. Humanism borrows from Christian ethics while denying accountability to its source—Christ.
- b. The noble ideals of humanism have no rational foundation.
- c. Christianity thrives on “principles”; the humanist on “preferences.”
- d. The principal vehicle for the dissemination of humanist philosophy is the public school system.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Distinguish humanism from humanitarianism.
2. How have classical humanists managed to maintain a link with Christianity, claiming a harmonious relationship? Counter the humanist’s claims from a Christian point of view.
3. Describe the influence of humanism on western culture.
4. What should be the response of Christians to a pervading humanist worldview?

## 4

# Pragmatism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine pragmatism as a philosophy affecting our culture.
2. To compare pragmatism with the teachings of Christianity.

### OUTLINE

- I. Pragmatism developed in the U.S. and reflects the genius of the American culture.
  - a. Harvey Cox wrote *The Secular City* which evaluates pragmatism as being the dominant influence in producing the style of American life.
    - i. The pragmatist doesn't think in terms of ultimate or religious questions.
    - ii. The spirit of pragmatism is the spirit of problem-solving.
  - b. The pragmatist is either skeptical or agnostic about man's ability to discover ultimate truth.
  - c. As a formal philosophy, pragmatism proceeds from a prior skepticism of metaphysics or theology.
  - d. Pragmatism looks at life from the perspective of naturalism.
- II. There is a point of distinction between pragmatism and Christianity.
  - a. Romans 1 paints a bleak picture of the man who will not have God in his thinking.
  - b. What you choose to believe or not to believe greatly affects your actions. People act in accordance with their value systems.
  - c. *Pragmatism* is a theory of truth; *practicality* is a test of truth.
    - i. It has become highly subjective.
    - ii. Since there is no absolute truth, truth is experiential.
- III. Historically, there have been several key criticism of pragmatism.
  - a. It is predominantly subjective.

- b. It tends to focus on short-term consequences.
  - i. Problem-solving often leads to more problems.
  - ii. The main conflict between Christianity and pragmatism is the conflict between what is right and what is expedient.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it natural for Americans especially to be enamored by pragmatism? What presuppositions must first be embraced or thrown out for a culture to subscribe so heartily to this philosophy?
2. What's wrong with pragmatism from a theological perspective?
3. How does the pragmatist fit the description of the man in Romans 1?
4. How has pragmatism crept into the Christian church?

## 5

# Positivism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To examine positivism as a philosophical system of life and worldview.

### OUTLINE

- I. Positivism emerged in Europe in the 19th century and is usually associated with August Comte.
  - a. Comte was a scientist/philosopher with a vision for societal reformation.
  - b. He envisioned a society dominated by scientific knowledge.
  
- II. Historically, we have tried to find a unifying factor for the parts of life.
  - a. For the Christian, that unity is in God.
  - b. For Comte, there was a natural law for the universe and for society.
  - c. As man progresses and matures, so does society. His stages were:
    - i. The *infantile stage*, where people seek religious answers;
    - ii. The *philosophical stage*, based on more abstract reasoning;
    - iii. The *scientific stage*, where man reaches maturity.
  - d. For Comte, the only absolute was that everything was relative.
  - e. It has been called a religion without God.
  
- III. Positivism led to *logical positivism*, which led to *analytical philosophy*.
  - a. A small group of thinkers known as the Vienna Circle set out in the 1900s to eliminate the influence of metaphysics and religion on culture.
  - b. The contribution of logical positivism was the Verification Principle, which states that truth had to be verified empirically (by the senses).
  - c. Since God could not be verified by the senses, the word God was meaningless.
  - d. The cost of positivism was high, destroying unity and divorcing science from the whole realm of truth.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does positivism fail as an “ism”?
2. What are the theological errors that negate each of Comte’s societal stages?
3. What happens when everything becomes relative?
4. Where does the “Verification Principle” break down?

## 6

# Pluralism and Relativism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To examine the last two ideologies that contribute to our cultural foundation.

### OUTLINE

- I. The basic tenet of pluralism is that there is no ultimate unity to bring cohesiveness to our lives.
  - a. We have particulars, but no universals; the relative but not the absolute.
  - b. Plurality, as an “ism,” means that there is no unity to life.
  - c. *Relativity* is the key word of the 20th century.
    - i. The idea is that there are different perspectives from which to consider everything.
    - ii. If everything is relative then nothing is concrete or ultimately true.
  - d. Relativity leads necessarily to chaos, because there is no fixed reference point by which one measures or judges.
    - i. Relativity is the very antithesis of Christianity.
    - ii. It leaves the church in total chaos.
    - iii. It leaves a culture with purposes, but no purpose; truths, but no truth.
  
- II. Pluralism directly confronts Christianity.
  - a. People claim legal rights but don't consider moral rights because morality has become relative.
  - b. Christianity requires that all views be treated with tolerance, but not necessarily with validity. Pluralism objects to that.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the integral relationship between pluralism and relativism?
2. Give examples of how you can have particulars without universals; purposes with purpose, and truths without truth.
3. How has your life been affected by pluralism and relativism?
4. What's the end for a church that embraces pluralism?

# 7

## Hedonism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To review the impact of hedonism on our lives.
2. To examine hedonism as a world and life view.

### OUTLINE

- I. Hedonism defines the *good* or *true* in terms of *pleasure* and *pain*.
  - a. The hedonist seeks to increase pleasure and decrease pain.
  - b. This movement sprung from the ancient Greek school of the *Cyrenaics*.
  - c. It actually became a religion, where, through pleasure, man transcended to a higher experience of consciousness.
  - d. The Epicureans adopted a more moderate approach because of the “hedonistic paradox.”
    - i. If one didn’t find pleasure, one was frustrated.
    - ii. If one did, one became bored—both of which are bad.
  - e. *Atarachia* was the search for peace of mind.
  - f. The Stoics settled for peace of mind through self-control.
- II. Christianity says up front that there will be pain along the way.
  - a. The hedonist declares Christ a fool for accepting unnecessary pain.
  - b. Christianity sees pleasure differently than does the hedonist.
- III. The modern hedonist lets his “feelings” dictate his responses.
  - a. We are a nation preoccupied with analyzing our moods.
  - b. We induce feelings artificially with drugs.
  - c. Hedonism makes value judgments, producing a system of ethics, which produces a behavioral pattern of morality.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the effects of hedonism in Christian circles today.
2. Have a mock discussion between a classical Christian and a classical hedonist over the cost of the Christian life.
3. How do you stop the influence of hedonism on the lives of your family?

## 8

# Science

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the Christian's role in the scientific enterprise.
2. To see how we live in a culture influenced by the scientific world.

### OUTLINE

- I. Science begins as a mandate given by God.
  - a. Man is given dominion over the earth.
  - b. The scientific enterprise is an area of God's dominion.
    - i. It is under God's authority.
    - ii. It is restrained by God's law.
    - iii. For centuries, the scientist saw his vocation as a call from God.
- II. Today, however, science and faith seem incompatible.
  - a. Kant taught that science was useful in studying physics, but not metaphysics.
  - b. Many thinkers followed that since God can't be known by reason, He must be known by experience or intuition.
  - c. Thomas Aquinas dealt with a form of this in the 13th century, when he refuted the notion of "double truths."
    - i. Some things are learned from nature.
    - ii. Others are learned only by grace-revelation.
    - iii. It is important to distinguish but never to separate the two.
- III. What is true in science will ultimately confirm the truths of Scripture.
  - a. Truth never contradicts itself.
  - b. Scientific truth may supplement Scripture, but it will not contradict Scripture.
  - c. Scriptural truth will not contradict scientific truth.
  - d. Science *may* correct *theology*, but never the Scriptures.

- e. The scientific method is based upon both *induction* and *deduction* for the inquiry toward truth.
  - i. *Induction* involves gathering data.
  - ii. *Deduction* involves application of the formal laws of logic.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors have led to the chasm between science and faith?
2. Why could God not be known by reason, but only by experience?
3. What implications does that thinking have for theology?
4. How might science contradict theology, but not the Bible?
5. What are areas of science which pose difficulty to your faith? Why? How might these difficulties be resolved?

# Economics

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To consider the Christian's relationship to economics.
2. To see economics as a Christian concern because of its ethical nature.

## OUTLINE

- I. The life of the Christian is very closely involved with the study of economics in several ways.
  - a. The Greek word, *oikonomia* (literally "house law"), is translated "stewardship" in the New Testament.
  - b. God holds us accountable for what He has given us.
    - i. The prodigal son wasted his owner's goods.
    - ii. God's judgment fell on them both.
- II. There are at least four principles repeated in the Bible: private property; equity; industry; and compassion.
  - a. Equity is most central to the Bible's concern for economics, and compassion would follow.
  - b. In biblical terms, the essence of godly behavior is justice and mercy.
  - c. The Bible gives us a work ethic that calls us to industry; God sanctifies labor.
  - d. The Bible also teaches us to participate in the ownership of what we produce, and to protect it.
- III. Man's material welfare is a major concern of God's and therefore must be a major concern of God's people.
  - a. The most important ingredient to benefit man's material life is production.
  - b. The most important ingredient for production is tools.
  - c. The most important ingredient for tools is capital (money).

- d. The most important ingredient for capital is profit.
  - i. Profit is the goal of all economic exchange.
  - ii. It is the basis of commerce.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does all this have to do with Christianity?
2. What is the biblical injunction to the Christian regarding economics?
3. How is economics an ethical issue?
4. Why do believers sometimes respond as if successful business profit is somehow ungodly?
5. How is the Christian able to avoid the twin perils of radical spiritualism and radical materialism?
6. How does our understanding of God as the creator of the world affect our view of material resources? of our labor?
7. How does the culture confuse equity and equality? How can we avoid making the same mistakes?

# Government

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the relationship of the Christian to the ruling government.
2. To see what should be our attitude and response to government.

## OUTLINE

- I. “There is no authority except from God . . .” (Rom. 13:1).
  - a. Authority is derived from the character of God Himself, not the will of man.
  - b. Christianity, in its essential message, is pervasively political.
    - i. A major theme of the New Testament is the coming of the kingdom of God.
    - ii. This involves the rule, the reign, and the kingship of God.
  - c. Authority is established by God.
    - i. He who resists authority opposes the ordinance of God.
    - ii. He brings condemnation on himself.
  - d. This obligates the Christian to submit to authority as unto God Himself.
    - i. Paul was not writing to Jews about obeying the Sanhedrin.
    - ii. He was writing to Romans, whose government eventually killed him.
  - e. All human authority comes under God’s authority.
    - i. This is not to say that all men exercise godly rule.
    - ii. Government can oppose God, but He is sovereign.
    - iii. The Christian is asked to have a spirit of obedience as opposed to the spirit of lawlessness, the mark of antichrist.
  - f. The Christian must obey God supremely.
- II. Government is force.
  - a. Human government was established only after the Fall.
  - b. It is a force to restrain evil for the maintenance of human life and property.

- c. Augustine said, "Governments are a necessary evil."
  - i. If God removed all human restraints, life would be intolerable.
  - ii. Though some governments may abuse power, they could be worse still.
- d. The Christian is free to be an agent of the government, since he is ultimately an agent of God, who oversees that government.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Summarize Romans 13's argument regarding a Christian's relationship to good government? evil government?
2. What is God's purpose for the institution of government?
3. How do you avoid involving God in evil, since there are so many evil governments?
4. What guidelines would you establish for disobeying man and obeying God?
5. What is the role of the church in encouraging government to recognize its responsibility before God?
6. How can the church manifest the kingship of Christ over the world?

# Art

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To consider the Christian's relationship to the world of art.
2. To consider art as a positive expression for the Christian.

## OUTLINE

- I. The Christian is concerned with the good, the true, and the beautiful.
  - a. The study of goodness deals with ethics.
  - b. The study of truth deals with philosophy.
  - c. The study of beauty deals with aesthetics.
    - i. God is the supreme artist.
    - ii. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows forth His handiwork" (Ps. 19).
    - iii. The temple in the Old Testament was an extravagant project of art.
    - iv. That which is beautiful should never be boring.
- II. Many artists have dealt with themes from Scripture.
  - a. Rembrandt and Michelangelo did so in their paintings.
  - b. Mozart, Chopin, and Handel did so with their music.
- III. The impetus for Christian art is excellence.
  - a. Form is important, but the message is paramount.
  - b. The God who ordained the world is the supreme example of excellence in all that is good, true, and beautiful.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss whether all Christian art, while excellent, must be beautiful.
2. How do you avoid “relativism” creeping into your analysis of what is “beautiful”?
3. How do form and content go together? In other words, what message could form convey?

# Literature

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the Christian's relationship to literature.
2. To understand the culture better through its literature.

## OUTLINE

- I. There is a general lack of appreciation for literature in our culture.
  - a. In a given year, only 4 percent of the public buys a book.
  - b. Book publishers and distributors cater to those who do buy, appealing to a lower common denominator and generally producing a lower class of literature.
- II. The writer is a verbal artist, a wordsmith.
  - a. His primary task is to produce works that are concrete, rather than abstract.
  - b. The popular literature generally follows popular philosophy.
    - i. Herman Melville wrote his classic *Moby Dick* during a time when people cared about the transcendent.
    - ii. That novel is about the metaphysical, about God.
    - iii. Though today's novels seem preoccupied with the existence of God, the attitudes and feelings are different.
  - c. The novelist doesn't just record life, he *interprets* it.
  - d. He must observe life so he can translate it.
  - e. He must see what others pass over; he makes the commonplace significant.
- III. The Christian must not ignore literature.

## .DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think so few people read today?
2. How are the attitudes of today's writers toward God different than writers of previous ages? What are they saying? How does this fit in with Francis Shaeffer's reference to this cultural period as post-Christian?
3. How does the Christian avoid being improperly influenced by literature?