

## Consequences of Ideas

### Lesson 3

Friederich Nietzsche, a nineteenth century philosopher whose ideas continue to have a profound effect on our society. Said Nietzsche: "I condemn Christianity; I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible of all the accusations that an accuser has ever had in his mouth. It is, to me, the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; it seeks to work the ultimate corruption, the worst possible corruption. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthlessness, and every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul."

#### I. Introduction

- a. Western Culture refers to the culture that has developed in the Western World and one might easily conclude is the **dominant** cultural form in the modern world.
- b. It can also be said that ideas spawned by this culture have come to play a **more** influential role on more diverse cultures world-wide than any other culture has done in history.
- c. What is called **Western Culture** is the set of literary, musical, philosophical, religious, economic, and scientific knowledge and traditions from Western Europe, the Mediterranean and primarily the U.S.
- d. The **roots** of Western Culture are found in three main historical sources: ancient Greece, the Roman Empire and Christianity.
- e. Understanding the contributions of each of these historic sources will help believers discern how the present day culture **both** reflects and refutes the Christian World View.
- f. Understanding these historic sources will reveal the primary problem confronting earnest Christians in the modern world which is that of **leavening** or corruption of truth.

#### II. The Problem of Leavening

- a. Under the **direct rule** of Jehovah, the ancient Nation of Israel in Exodus had no problem identifying what they were to do to enjoy complete harmony with God and to continue receiving His blessings. *Deut 12:1 These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. KJV*
- b. A fundamental part of their required code of conduct was absolute **separation** from the nations which they would encounter as they entered the Promised Land. *Deut 12:2-4 Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. KJV*
- c. Repeatedly God warned Israel of the ultimate consequence of not maintaining their distinct identity, culture, language, and religion. God warned Israel of the problem of **leavening**.
- d. His warnings went unheeded and His instructions for dealing with this **corruption** went ignored and as a result today we have the on-going geo-political situation in the Middle East that threatens world peace.
- e. In Western Culture, the amalgamation or leavening of **ideas**, practices, religions, and cultures, etc. is what the Western countries were born into.
- f. For the believer this is a major source of conflict and **confusion** because it is often difficult to discern whether ideas percolating through the culture are anathema to Christian faith or a part of it.
- g. The only **remedy** is for the believer to be steeped in his understanding of the Word of God, intimately abiding in Christ, and vigilant against everything in the culture that is not truth from God's perspective. *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:KJV*

#### III. Greek Contributions

- a. The time period in which Greece was dominant runs roughly 650 BC to **146 BC**; ending when Greece became a Province of Rome.
- b. Ancient Greek culture was very different from the cultures of earlier civilizations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was during the Greek period that math, science, **philosophy** and arts flourished.
- c. Ancient Greece also distinguished itself from other cultures that had previously inhabited roughly the same territory in that it was strongly patriarchal and **male** dominated.
- d. While the Jewish Bible **preceded** the philosophies of the Greeks and revealed God as the embodiment of all Good, and Beauty and Truth, it was through the philosophers that these ideas spread outside of Judaism.
- e. However, the Greek notions of Good, Beauty, and Truth were not to be found in the monotheistic God of Israel, but rather were attributable to **multiple** gods and even man himself.
- f. The Greek word *paideia* means "education" or "instruction." Paideia was the process of educating humans into their **true form**, the real and genuine human nature.
- g. Self-government was important to the Greeks, paideia, combined with ethos (habits), made a man good and made him **capable** as a citizen or a king.
- h. This education was not about learning a trade or an art which were considered mechanical tasks **unworthy** of a learned citizen—but was about training for liberty (freedom) and nobility (the beautiful).
- i. This is in essence the root of the idea of the importance of public education and is also where the historic belief in an **aristocratic** class finds its validation.

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- j. The philosophers from Socrates, through Plato and Aristotle were a significant influence over many early Christian **theologians** and their ideas could be found in much of medieval philosophy.
- k. Thus by **integrating** Greek philosophy into the discussion of Christian theology, a leavening process has taken place which has confused many unwary believers, particularly those who are not familiar with the sources of ideas they embrace.

#### IV. Ancient Rome

- a. The second **formative** influence on Western Culture was the Romans who conquered the Greeks in 146 BC.
- b. Roman culture was marked by its practicality, and perhaps the greatest Roman contribution to Western Culture has been Roman **law** which is apparent even in the legal system of our day.
- c. The Roman philosopher, **Cicero** was a major influence, not only in his country, but also upon the early Church and throughout medieval times, even affecting the framers of the U.S. Constitution.
- d. In terms of human agency, Emperor **Constantine** was single-handedly responsible for the unprecedented growth of the Christian faith.
- e. Whether he himself was a believer is a matter of debate but his impact on Christianity is not in question. For example, with the Edict of Milan, he **decreed** Christianity the major religion of the empire.
- f. In addition, he gave many **gifts** of land and money to build churches and to support the leaders of the church. He was also supportive of the Council of Nicea, which helped to define certain elements of Christian doctrine.
- g. The adoption of the Christian faith as a **State** religion is viewed by many as an effective methodology for institutionalizing Christianity into the fabric of the culture.
- h. However, in so doing, this move also served to leaven the true body of believers by **forcing** unbelievers into the Church. This also had a corrupting influence upon Church government as well.
- i. It was not until the Protestant Reformation in the **1500's** that many of these issues were dealt with by the Church.

#### V. Christianity

- a. The third and **most** formative influence on Western Culture is Christianity. It would be impossible to conceive of a Western Civilization apart from the role played by Christianity in bringing it about.
- b. When the Roman Empire collapsed in **305 A.D.**, it was Christianity, largely through the contribution of Catholic monks, who preserved learning and science.
- c. The preaching of the Gospel of salvation, and the Biblical **teaching** on Christian living not only affected the lives of people but also their art, literature, philosophy, architecture and economics.
- d. It was through Christian influence that the concept of limited government **under** God's authority and democracy are promoted.
- e. Laws were shaped by the Christian value of the dignity and **worth** of the individual. And, the Biblical premises on which family life are based were introduced by Christianity into society.
- f. Universities and monasteries founded by the Church during the **Middle Ages** preserved and developed scientific knowledge which contributed to advances in Western society.
- g. For **1500** years, scientific study was guided by the Biblical idea that creation is the product of a trustworthy God. To the scientist, nature was therefore knowable and was seen as orderly, something to be studied.
- h. Economics were impacted by the writings of **John Calvin** which set the stage for the development of Capitalism in England and legitimized the investment of capital for a return on investment.
- i. This catalogue of contributions to Western Civilization does **not even** begin to give adequate credit to the effect of the Christian faith upon the formation and development of Western culture.
- j. At the same time, however, the net effect of this intertwining of believers into the fabric of the culture has made it **more difficult** for modern Christians to remain cognizant of the unrelenting nature of the spiritual battle we face. *John 17:15-17 I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.KJV*

#### VI. Application

- a. To what degree do you recognize that your beliefs and attitudes are leavened by this world?
- b. To what extent do you view yourself as a "foreigner" traveling in a hostile land?
- c. What do you need to do in response to these discoveries about yourself?