

Consequences of Ideas

Lesson 7: Philosophy

Which of the following statements involves a philosophical position? Human life begins when the baby is viable. We ought not to have a death penalty. Redistribution of wealth ought to be achieved by tax policy. There are apparent contradictions in the Bible. Government ought to provide health care for everyone.

I. Introduction

- a. In this study thus far we have traced large scale cultural movements over time from the Greek period to the Enlightenment period and have seen how the seeds of ideas in earlier times are producing **fruit** in the present day.
- b. What is necessary is that we now delve deeper into the specific philosophers and their ideas to see the details of the thought processes of some of history's seminal thinkers in an effort to uncover the **roots** of their ideas.
- c. It is because philosophy studies not only **how** we know (epistemology) but **what** we know about reality (metaphysics) that the serious student of the Bible ought to have an interest in this topic.
- d. Although some philosophers hold that the quest for **ultimate** reality is beyond the domain of philosophy, others insist it is an important, if not essential pursuit for the serious student of the Bible.
- e. As we probe the thinking of these philosophers we will discover that many of our own theological **beliefs** share elements of a particular philosophy or are entirely built upon the philosophical presuppositions of one or another philosophical schools.
- f. In addition, by having a passing acquaintance with these various thinkers, we will begin to comprehend the point at which opponents of biblical Christianity may disagree with the Christian world view and how to **counter** their arguments.
- g. As we will see, believers and unbelievers alike, fail to **discern** the philosophical underpinnings of their beliefs. It is rare to find a person that is truly aware of the sources and the limitations of his philosophical presuppositions.
- h. This lapse leads to a type of "intellectual schizophrenia". Monday to Saturday some believe in the "Big Bang" theory of the Cosmos and on Sunday become believers in the Creation; failing to see that the two concepts are utterly **irreconcilable**.
- i. A basic understanding of philosophical thought and processes is **needful** for any serious student of the Bible.

II. Philosophy is Not Irrelevant to Christianity

- a. Philosophy has had a profound influence on the formation and development of institutions and values that have created the U.S. as we know it. An understanding and appreciation of philosophy will help us better understand our **culture**.
- b. Christians need to critically evaluate the underlying philosophical positions of **politicians** who attempt through evasions, omissions, and ambiguous language to seduce an unsuspecting populace into their godless policies.
- c. There are serious consequences for failing to be aware of contemporary thought patterns that we embrace. One becomes the **unwitting** prey of satanic influences if he is unaware that he holds beliefs that are inimical to the Christian faith.
- d. God is both moral and **rational**. His commands are not the result of arbitrary will, and, since Scripture does not prescribe *all* action in specific terms, the application of a biblical philosophy will assist us in acting on principle.
- e. Ultimately all truth is **God's truth**, and since philosophy is a quest for truth, then philosophy may contribute to our understanding of God and His world.

III. The Biblical Case for Philosophy

- a. A basic understanding of philosophy aides in the construction of the Christian systematic theology and helps to **refute** contrary views. Consider the point made by Paul: *2 Cor 10:5 "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God [negative aspect], and take every thought captive to obey Christ [positive aspect]"*
- b. The apostle Paul also **warns** believers in *Col 2:8 "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy"KJV*
- c. This verse is **not** a prohibition against philosophy as such, but against *false* philosophy, or philosophy that leads one to error. *"and [beware of] vain deceit, after the tradition of men."*
- d. Finally, one cannot really "beware" of false philosophy unless he is first **aware** of it. A Christian must recognize error before he can counter it.
- e. The Christian church has down through the ages been penetrated by false teaching precisely because Christians have not adequately been **trained** to detect the error being propagated.
- f. A good counterfeit will be as **close** to the truth as possible. This is why false, non-Christian philosophies that are dressed in Christian garb are particularly dangerous.
- g. God places no premium on ignorance. Christians do not receive a spiritual reward for an ignorant faith. Faith is more **meritorious** than reason but faith without reason is blind faith. *Heb 11:6 "without faith it is impossible to please God," NIV*
- h. Faith is commendable but reason is more **noble** *Acts 17:11 "the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they ... examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true," NIV*
- i. Indeed, loving God is in part an activity of the knowing **mind**: *Matt 22:37 "love the Lord your God with all your. . . minds" NIV*

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- j. Believers are to exercise **reason** as Peter indicates *1 Peter 3:15 "be ready always to give the reason for the hope that [we] have" KJV*
- k. Christians are to employ the philosophical procedures of argument and logic in **defending** their faith. Acts 17:2 we are set "in *defense* and confirmation of the gospel" KJV; *Phil 1:7 and he himself "reasoned. . . out of the scriptures"*.
- l. In 1 Cor 1:20 we are warned against "the wisdom of **this world**". But that is not to say that we should throw out all of philosophy. As C. S. Lewis observed, "*To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.*"

IV. The Role of Christian Philosophy

- a. There are several functions of philosophy in the service of Christianity. Philosophy has been called "the handmaiden of theology"; it is a defense against **heresy** and is the crux of apologetics.
- b. One cannot do **systematic** theology without the aid of philosophy. The Bible provides the basic data for Christian theology, but theology is not systematic until it is "systematized."
- c. For example, orthodox Christians believe in one God who eternally exists in three persons—the **Trinity**. Yet this doctrine is the result of several philosophical procedures.
- d. First, there is an **inductive** study (a method first described by Aristotle) of the Scriptures. Second, there is a systematic *correlation* (another philosophical tool of logical argument) of all the biblical data that relates to God.
- e. This yields, among other things, two **premises** (another philosophical tool of logical argument): (a) There is one God, and (b) there are three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who are God.
- f. Third, there is a logical **deduction** (*another reference to Aristotelian methods*) that is drawn from these two premises, that is, the doctrine of the Trinity: there is one God who exists in three persons.
- g. Beside "constructing" Christian doctrine, philosophy also aids us in answering that which is **logically** contradictory by helping us to recognize the issues.
- h. For example: When the Bible says God has eyes, and arms, and yet also claims that He is a spirit **without** a body then the theologian must be able to show that these are not logical contradictions.
- i. This is generally accomplished by reasoning that the references to eyes and arms are metaphorical, **not literal**. God is also described as having wings, but that illustrates His protective powers and does not mean He has feathers.
- j. That is not to say that philosophy answers all questions. The philosopher-theologian has a more difficult task with some of the **mysteries** of the Christian faith, such as the two natures of Christ.
- k. Orthodox Christianity holds that Christ is both God and man; He is the God-man. But God is infinite and man is finite. How, then, can Christ be an **infinite finite**, which seems to be a clear contradiction?
- l. The philosopher-theologian answers: Christ is one person, but He has *two* natures. He is infinite in His divine nature and finite in His human nature, but one nature **is not** the other.
- m. The two natures are distinct but exist simultaneously in the same person. The mystery is **how** this can be so. There is no contradiction in saying that Christ is one person (one sense) with two natures (another sense).
- n. Contradiction results only when one does not use two **different** senses, such as if one said God were one person and yet three persons *in the same sense*.
- o. In short, without the aid of logic and philosophy, Christian theology would not be **possible**. Coherent, consistent thinking about the Bible cannot take place without the aid of philosophy.
- p. The Christian theologian is in this sense a philosophical Bible student. He gives a **logos** (reason or expression of thought) about the *theos* (God) as known from Scripture.

V. Application

- a. The aim of this lesson is to underscore the importance of philosophy as a subject to us as Bible believing Christians and to demonstrate that philosophy permeates virtually every field of man's knowledge and every issue involving values.
- b. The challenge we face is recognizing the philosophical position being espoused by any speaker and then discerning whether such a position aligns with the Biblical principles or not.
- c. This week as you listen to or read the news make an effort to identify the philosophical positions being reported on and then determine how that position aligns with biblical principles.