



ENDURING QUESTIONS





ENDURING
QUESTIONS



WHY IDEAS MATTER.

Ultimate Outcomes is a non-profit organization founded on the fruit of the 30 plus years Pastor Richard Elwell and his wife Marty spent in church ministry, developing studies that would help their congregants discern and apply God's truth. Richard was a firm believer that the outcomes in our lives are a result of what ideas we choose to believe and follow.

After Richard died of a rare liver disease in 2018, Ultimate Outcomes has taken on the mission of sharing the Elwell's insights with all people who desire to live a better life and are willing to look to God for understanding of the way they are to go. To that end it makes available for free download on its website: Bible studies, Sunday school curriculum, and sermon podcasts.

Richard earned a Master of Divinity degree from the International School of Theology and was the founding and senior pastor at University Park Church, San Bernardino, CA for over 30 years. His passion was always to make God's truth understandable and applicable to all who hunger for it. Marty holds a Master's Degree in Teaching Processes from Claremont Graduate University. Her passion has been to train women and provide curriculum for parents who want to raise up their children up in the ways of the Lord.

<https://www.ultimateoutcomes.org>

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ENDURING QUESTIONS

STUDY CONTENTS

Introduction

1. What Is the Nature of Reality?	1
2. What Is the Nature of God?	11
3. What Is the Nature of Man?	21
4. What Is the Nature of Truth?	27
5. What Is the Nature of Freedom?	35
6. What Is the Basis of Morality?	41
7. What Is the Basis of Authority?	49
8. The Road Map	57



THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS OF LIFE

There are four basic questions of life, the answer in which all of what is important about life is found. A person's direction in life is set based on how these four questions are answered.

- a) Where did I come from? (origin)
- b) Why am I here? (meaning)
- c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)
- d) Where am I going? (destiny)

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will provide foundational answers to life's most foundational questions. In correctly answering these questions, we become armed with the ability to analyze correctly the merit of every idea.

Why is it important to analyze correctly ideas?

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF REALITY?

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

THE DEFINITION OF TERMS

Nature – The basic constitution, essence or inherent character of a person or thing.

Reality – The totality of real things and events, which includes physical creation and all that transpires within it.

COMPETING VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF REALITY

Note: In the diagrams below, the circle represents reality.

1. **Existentialism** – There is no independent reality. Reality is subject to our perceptions and experiences. We create our own reality. Reality is what we think it is.

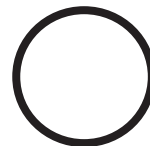


REALITY DOESN'T EXIST

2. **Naturalism** – Reality is confined to the natural world and is subject to natural law. Naturalism holds that there is no God or if there is a god then it is a god who is confined to and subject to nature and evolving along with nature.



GOD IS CONFINED
TO NATURE



THERE IS NO GOD

3. **Supernaturalism** – Nature and its laws were created by God. God himself exists in and through the natural world as well as above and beyond the natural world. Supernaturalism holds that natural laws are dependent upon God and that God can and does intervene into and supersedes natural law.



**GOD IS BOTH INVOLVED IN
AND EXISTS BEYOND HIS CREATION**

4. What is the best evidence that would cause someone to believe each position?

Existentialism

Naturalism



Note: The first two beliefs people hold to because of want, not evidence.

Supernaturalism

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

How does the scripture confirm supernaturalism?

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:1-3, 14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, ²and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

How does the scripture confirm supernaturalism?

THINKING IT THROUGH

BELIEF SYSTEM EVALUATION

What difference does it make which view of the nature of reality we hold?

What we believe determines our actions. What would be the different responses and results to the situations that follow depending on a person's view of the nature of reality?

Personal Anxiety

How would an existentialist deal with personal anxiety and what would be the result?

Result:

How would a naturalist deal with personal anxiety and what would be the result?

Result:

Philippians 4:6-7

6Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

According to the passage what is a supernatural approach to dealing with personal anxiety and the result?

Result:

Relational Conflict

How would an existentialist deal with relational conflict and what would be the result?

Result:

How would a naturalist deal with relational conflict and what would be the result?

Result:

Romans 12:17-21

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

According to the passage what is a supernatural approach to resolving relational conflict and the result?

Result:

Problem Solving

How would an existentialist deal with problem solving and what would be the result?

Result:

How would a naturalist deal with problem solving and what would be the result?

Result:

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

According to the passage what is a supernatural approach to problem solving and the result?

Result:

Purpose for Living

What would an existentialist believe is the purpose for living and what would be the result of living that way?

Result:

What would a naturalist believe is the purpose for living and what would be the result of living that way?

Result:

Hebrews 13:20-21

²⁰May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

According to the passage what is our purpose for living and what would be the result of living that way?

Result:

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

1 John 3:21-24

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

How does our relationship with Christ demonstrate supernaturalism?

ROADBLOCKS TO SUPERNATURAL INTERVENTION

1 Peter 4:1-4

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

What are the roadblocks that need to be removed to allow God's supernatural intervention into our lives?



Remember: We need to get rid of the idea that the natural world is the foremost reality and will meet our needs. We have to recognize we can't pursue the natural and the supernatural at the same time.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

Reflecting back to the Belief Systems Evaluation in the Thinking It Through section what belief does your most common response reflect in terms of:

1. Personal anxiety:
 - a. I think that avoiding the situation or thinking positive thoughts will make me feel better.
 - b. I think that a change of circumstances or something outside myself will bring me peace.
 - c. I seek to uncover my own sin that separates me from God's peace.
2. Relational conflict:
 - a. I avoid or exclude the person to avoid dealing with the conflict.
 - b. I try to work out in my mind how to make the person see he or she is wrong.
 - c. I hold the relationship in prayer and ask God to show me what I need to do.
3. Problem solving:
 - a. I try to pretend the problem doesn't exist.
 - b. I try to figure out the solution through my own means.
 - c. I hold the problem in prayer and ask God to show me what I need to do.
4. Purpose for living:
 - a. I feel discouraged because there doesn't seem to be any real purpose or meaning to life.
 - b. I live my life to please myself and try to bring honor and recognition to me.
 - c. I know the purpose of my life is to give myself more fully to God so that he can work in me and I can please and honor him.

ANSWERING THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS

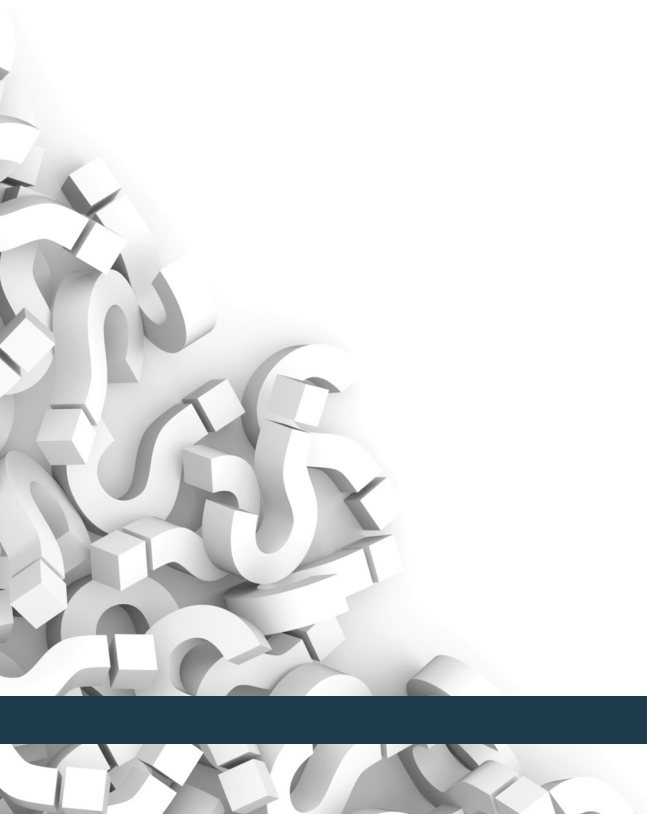
1. How would a supernaturalist answer the four basic questions of life?
 - a) Where did I come from? (origin)
 - b) Why am I here? (meaning)
 - c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)
 - d) Where am I going? (destiny)

2. How would a naturalist answer the four basic questions of life?
 - a) Where did I come from? (origin)
 - b) Why am I here? (meaning)
 - c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)
 - d) Where am I going? (destiny)

3. How would an existentialist answer the four basic questions of life?
 - a) Where did I come from? (origin)
 - b) Why am I here? (meaning)
 - c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)
 - d) Where am I going? (destiny)

PRAYER

Pray that through this study your eyes would be open to see clearly the ideas you believe that are not of God and how believing them impacts how you live your life.



WHAT IS THE NATURE OF GOD?

LESSON 2



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the different views of the nature of reality?
 - a. Existentialism
 - b. Naturalism
 - c. Supernaturalism
2. How is our approach to life affected by our view of the nature of reality?

CAN THE NATURE OF GOD BE KNOWN?

Romans 1:19-20

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

1. What can we know about the nature of God from creation alone?

2. Why is it important to know the nature of God?

COMPETING VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF GOD

1. **Atheism** – There is no God.

2. **Agnosticism** – If there is a god, he is unknowable.

3. **Polytheism** – The belief and worship of many gods.

4. **Pantheism** – The belief that God and the universe are identical. God is the impersonal essence of all things, both good and evil.

5. **Monotheism** – The belief in one incorporeal, personal, eternal, creator God.
Incorporeal –
Personal –
Eternal –
Creator –

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD IS UNIQUE

Deuteronomy 4:35, 39 & 6:4

³⁵You have been shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other.

³⁹Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

What aspect of God's nature do the verses reveal?

GOD IS SPIRIT

John 4:24

²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

What aspect of God's nature does the verse reveal?

GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

Exodus 3:13-14

¹³Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' And they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

¹⁴God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

What aspect of God's nature do the verses reveal?

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

Proverbs 15:3

³The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

What aspect of God's nature does the verse reveal?

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

Amos 4:13

¹³He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, and treads the high places of the earth – the Lord God Almighty is his name.

What aspect of God's nature does the verse reveal?

GOD IS PERFECT

Deuteronomy 32:4

⁴He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

What aspect of God's nature does the verse reveal?

GOD HAS A WILL

Romans 12:2

²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

What aspect of God's nature does the verse reveal?

GOD ENTERED INTO HUMAN EXISTENCE

Luke 1:31-33

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

What aspect of God's nature do the verses reveal?

SUMMARY: The Westminster Shorter Catechism

God is spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What we believe about the nature of God will dictate how we respond to him. How we respond to God determines what we do.

a. What is the response of an atheist or agnostic to the evidence of God?

What does that lead to?

b. What is the response of a pantheist or polytheist to the evidence of God?

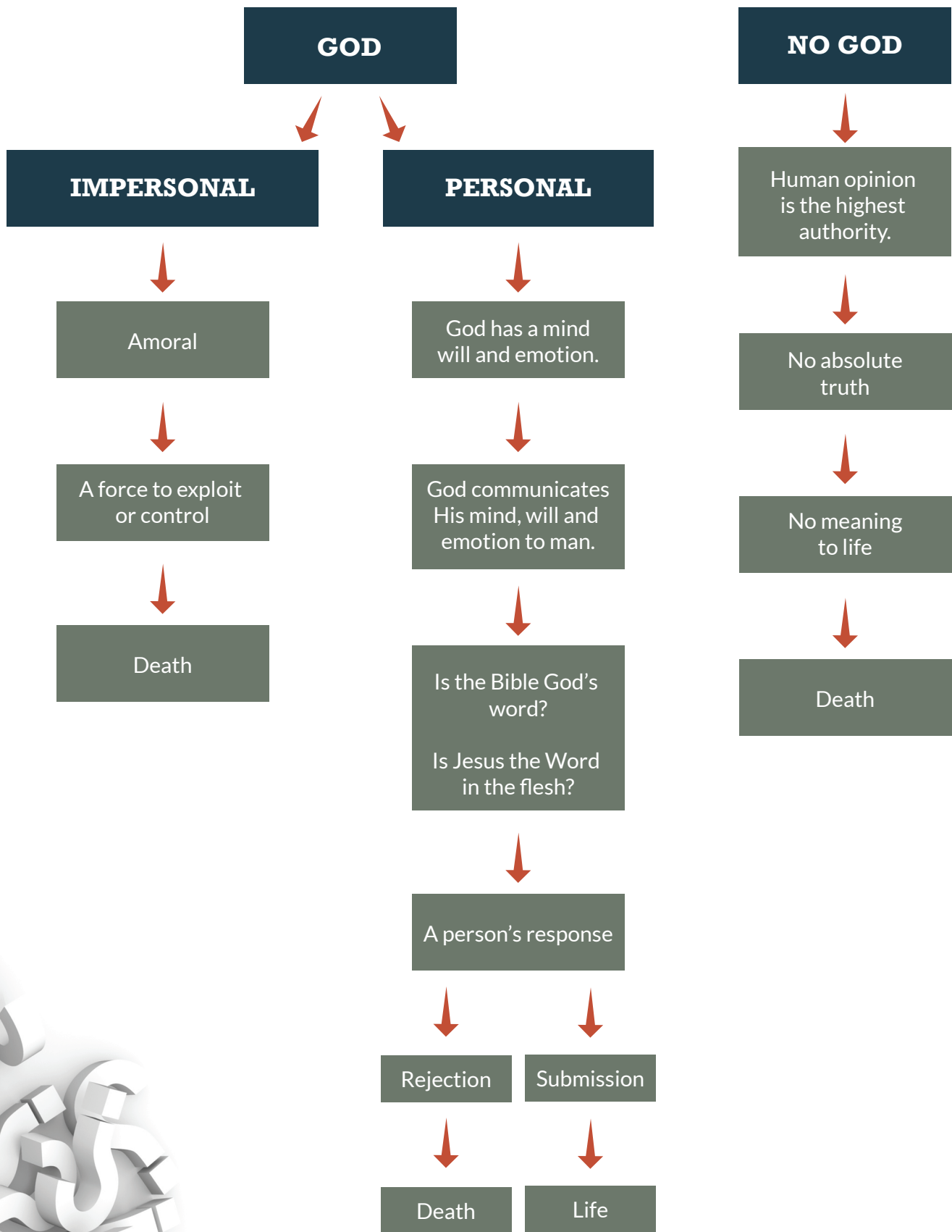
What does that lead to?

c. What is the response of a monotheist to the evidence of God?

What does that lead to?

2. Review the “No God or God” chart that follows.

GOD OR NO GOD CHART



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

CONTRASTING UNDERSTANDING

The Progression of Depravity

Romans 1:18-32

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

What is the progression in Romans 1:18-32?

The Progression of Holiness

2 Peter 1:3-11

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

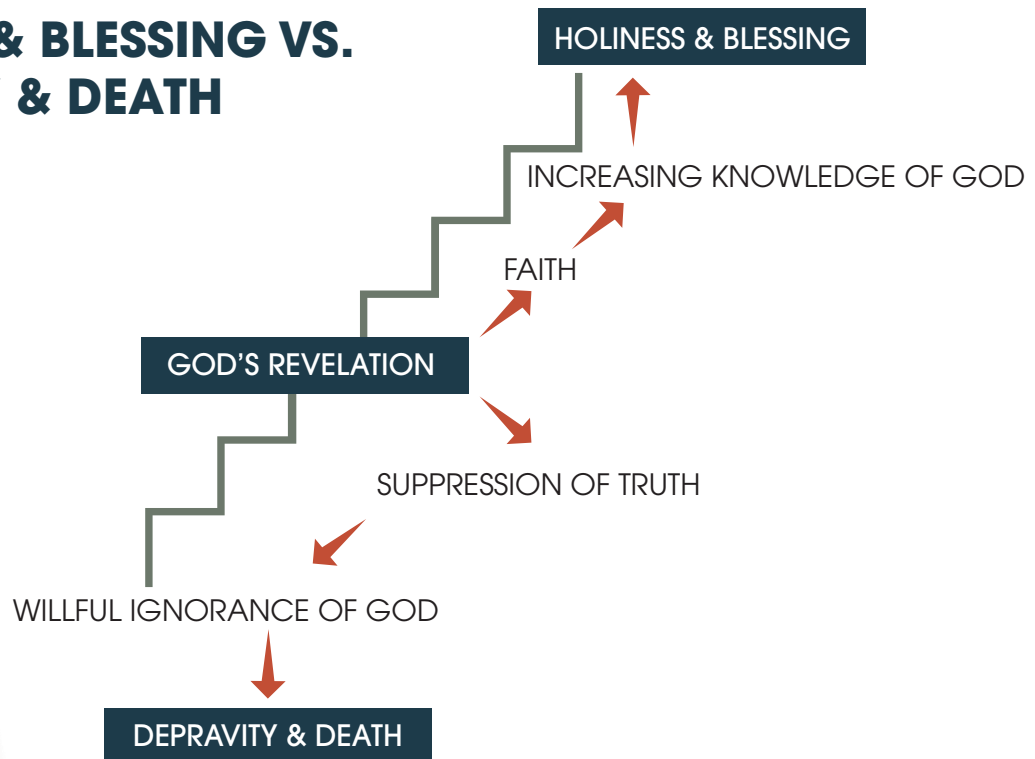
⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But if anyone does not have them, he is near sighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

¹⁰Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What is the progression in 2 Peter 1:3-11?

What is the contrast between Romans 1:18-32 and 2 Peter 1:3-11?

HOLINESS & BLESSING VS. DEPRAVITY & DEATH



CAN GOD BE FULLY KNOWN?

Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

1. Why can't God be fully known?
2. How should we view getting to know God?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. How does my life show that I am anxious to increase in the knowledge of God?
2. In what view of God am I functioning?
3. How am I approaching God?

PRAYER

Thank God that he is God and has all understanding, goodness, and power. Pray that your desire and pursuit would be to know him more fully as he truly is.



WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MAN?

LESSON 3



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the competing ideas of the nature of reality?

Existentialism –

Naturalism –

Supernaturalism –

2. What are the competing ideas of the nature of God?

Atheism –

Agnosticism –

Polytheism –

Pantheism –

Monotheism –

LOOKING AT THE NATURE OF MAN

1. What is different about human behavior from the behavior of animals?

2. What does the fact that humans are free moral agents reveal about man?

COMPETING VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF MAN

1st View – Man is born innocent and holy and is corrupted by evil in his environment.

Jean Jacque Rousseau – noble savage, born holy, defiled by evil family, society institutions

Sigmund Freud – childhood traumas

2nd View – Man was created holy but became a corrupted race by willful disobedience to God.

Biblical revelation – Genesis

Common sense observation

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE CREATION OF MAN

Genesis 1:26, 31

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day.

What do the verses say about the nature of man as he was created?

GOD'S ONE RULE FOR MAN

Genesis 2:15-17

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

What was God's one rule for man?

THE BREAKING OF THE COVENANT WITH GOD

Genesis 3:1-7

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

⁴"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

What happened as a result of man's breaking his covenant with God?

THE ORIGIN OF OUR CORRUPT NATURE

Psalms 51:5

⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

What does this verse tell us about the origin of our corrupt nature?

THE GENESIS OF EVIL

Matthew 15:16-20

¹⁶"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.' "

Where does evil behavior begin?



Remember: Jesus was human like us, but he was without sin because his heart was right. He only wanted what the Father wanted.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does our understanding of human nature and the origin of evil behavior affect our approach to solving the problem of evil?



Illustration: Sinking boat

If your boat is sinking in the ocean, is it a more feasible solution to get rid of all the water in the ocean or patch the leak in the boat? How does that relate to the problem of human evil?

2. Fill in the chart below with the solution to evil and the end result depending on the view of the problem of evil.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EVIL BEHAVIOR			
	Problem of Evil	Solution to Evil	Result
Communism	Class System, Economic Institutions		
Liberalism	Poverty, Disadvantage Discrimination		
Judeo-Christian Republic	Heart of man, Man selfish and sinful		
PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EVIL BEHAVIOR			
Freudianism	Childhood trauma, Bad parenting		
Behavioral Determinism (man a machine)	External stimulus, Chemical imbalance		
Biblical Sanctification	Sinful heart		

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF BELIEF

Analyze the impact of the idea of the nature of man on different aspects of life.

- **The effect of belief on child training – Proverbs 22:15**

¹⁵Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

How does our view of the nature of man affect how we raise our children?

Born holy

Born fallen

- **The effect of belief on our own behavior – Ephesians 5:11**

¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

How does our understanding of the nature of man affect how we deal with our own evil behavior?

Born holy

Born fallen

- **The effect of belief on relationships - Matthew 7:3-5**

³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

How does our understanding of the nature of man affect how we deal with the evil behavior of other people towards us?

Born holy

Born fallen

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What area of sin in my heart is God challenging me with?

2. What truth do I need to discover and believe in God's word to set me free from this area of sin in my heart?

ANSWERING THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS

How would your view of the nature of man affect how you would answer the four basic questions of life?

- a) Where did I come from? (origin)

Born holy:

Born Fallen:

- b) Why am I here? (meaning)

Born holy:

Born fallen:

- c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)

Born holy:

Born fallen:

- d) Where am I going? (destiny)

Born holy:

Born fallen:

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF TRUTH?

LESSON 4



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Lesson 1 – What are the competing ideas of the nature of reality?

Existentialism –

Naturalism –

Supernaturalism –

2. Lesson 2 – What are the competing ideas of the nature of God?

Atheism –

Agnosticism –

Polytheism –

Pantheism –

Monotheism –

Why is how we view God so important?

3. Lesson 3 – What are the two competing ideas of the nature of man?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The ancient Hebrew view of truth was that truth is the opposite of unreliable. Truth is whatever is faithful, trustworthy and stable, true action or practice. Truth is seen in the sense of a true friend, something with integrity that is as it should be.

Example: Lay down a level and it gives a true, accurate reading.

The ancient Greek view of truth was that truth is the opposite of deception. Truth is an accurate perception of the facts. Truth was seen in the sense of a true idea.

Example: $1+1=2$ is a proposition that is true. It fits reality.

The New Testament combines the two views of truth into one concept, which includes both the practical Hebrew view and the theoretical Greek view.

Hebrew – heart – action – actually works
Greek – mind – idea – fits reality

COMPETING VIEWS OF THE NATURE OF TRUTH

1st View: Truth is relative.

This view of the nature of truth believes that man is the measure of all things. Truth, therefore, is whatever each person decides it is for himself. This view holds that truth is invented by man and changes depending on circumstances. Invent means to originate as a product of one's own ingenuity or experimentation. There is more than one notion of truth since there is more than one man.

2nd View: Truth is absolute.

This view of the nature of truth believes that God is the measure of all things and that truth comes from God. Truth is unchangeable and is not dependent upon appearances or circumstances. This view holds that truth is revealed by God and discovered by man. Discover means to gain sight or knowledge of something that already exists but was previously unseen or unknown.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Psalm 43:3

³Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

What does this verse tell us about the nature of truth?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S CREATION AND TRUTH

Romans 1:18-20

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

What is the relationship between God's creation and the truth?



Note: An atheistic scientist would never discover any truth if he couldn't examine God's creation. No one can even come up with an idea without examining something God made.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S TRUTH AND US

John 17:15-19

¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What is the relationship between the truth, God's word, and us?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE TRUTH

John 1:1-5,14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What does the life of Christ show us about the nature of truth?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE TRUTH

John 16:13-15

¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

What role does the Holy Spirit have in relation to the revelation of the truth?

THE SOURCE AND CONSEQUENCE OF FALSEHOOD

2 Peter 2:1-3

¹But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. ²Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

What is the source of falsehood and the consequences of believing falsehood?

SUMMARY

God reveals truth through creation, through his word, and through his Son by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Since truth already exists we are to discover it; we don't invent it.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What are some modern expressions that show how we view the nature of truth?
2. What are some examples of ideas that many people believe are true but are mere inventions of man?
3. What is the difference between the origin of truth and the origin of falsehood?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF TRUTH

John 8:31-32

³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

What is the power and purpose of the truth?

THE IMPERISHABLE SEED

1 Peter 1:22-25

²²Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴For,

"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord stands forever."

What does the truth plant in us?

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE TRUTH

Psalm 51:5-7, 13

⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. ⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

What should be our relationship to the truth?



Remember: Truth beliefs should fill our mind so that true actions characterize our lives. Jesus never sinned because he only believed what was of God and true.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Is the truth in me? How do I know that?
2. Is the truth coming out of me? How do I know that?
3. Do I invent truth to meet my needs or make it relative to suit me? In what way?
4. Am I more loyal to the truth than anything else? How do I show that?
5. Do I believe something because I think it benefits me or because it is true?
How do I show that?

ANSWERING THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS

How would your view of the nature of truth affect how you would answer the four basic questions of life?

- a) Where did I come from? (origin)
Relative truth –
Revealed truth –
- b) Why am I here? (meaning)
Relative truth –
Revealed truth –
- c) What is the right thing to do? (morality)
Relative truth –
Revealed truth –
- d) Where am I going? (destiny)
Relative truth –
Revealed truth –

PRAYER

Thank God that truth comes from him and his unchanging. Pray that you would really want to know and see God truth and recognise ideas that are the invention of men.



WHAT IS THE NATURE OF FREEDOM?

LESSON 5



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the three competing views of the nature of reality?

- a.
- b.
- c.

Key issue is determining the meaning of life.

2. What are the five competing views of the nature of God?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Key issue is how you relate to God.

3. What are the two competing views of the nature of man?

- a.
- b.

Key issue is that our view of ourselves and the nature of evil are determined by how we view the nature of man.

4. What are the two competing views of the nature of truth?

- a.
- b.

Key issue is coming to a correct view of how things work.

COMPETING VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF FREEDOM

1st View: Freedom is being able to do whatever you want.

Among those who believe the first view of the nature of freedom is a 19th century American philosopher, Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau believed that freedom is a condition in which there is as little law as possible. In this view of freedom, law is seen as the enemy of freedom, as law curbs and restricts freedom. Freedom is when individuals are able to follow their own will, unrestrained by the law. It is the greatest capacity to do what you want without restraint i.e., “If it feels good do it.”



Illustration: What happens to children who are raised according to this view?

2nd View: Freedom is the ability to do what is right without external constraint.

Among those who believe the second view of the nature of freedom is the 19th century French philosopher, Fredrick Hegel. Hegel believed that freedom is the ability to act in accord with right laws or principles. Freedom is achieved when the right laws are internalized into and made part of the conscience of a person. In this view, God’s law is not the enemy of freedom; it’s the basis of freedom. The law liberates us when it is written on our hearts. We end up wanting to do what is right.



Illustration: The Old Testament hygiene laws were given to the Israelites to set them apart for God and protect them from all kinds of diseases, hand washing being one of them. In obeying God’s hygiene laws the Israelites (even without knowing why) were free from the diseases that plagued other peoples.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

A MAN IS A SLAVE TO WHATEVER HAS MASTERED HIM

2 Peter 2:17-20

¹⁷These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

What principle of freedom can be drawn out of the passage?

Example: What does following traffic laws enable us to do?

ALL MEN ARE SLAVES

Romans 6:17-23

¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What principle of freedom can be drawn out of the passage?

FREEDOM BEGINS WITH TRANSFORMATION

Romans 12:2

²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

What principle of freedom can be drawn out of the passage?

THE PERFECT LAW GIVES FREEDOM

James 1:22-25

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

What principle of freedom can be drawn out of the passage?

Illustration: What is the difference between saying, "I have to do..." and "I want to do..."?

WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD THERE IS FREEDOM

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

What principle of freedom can be drawn out of the passage?



Remember: To truly be free we need to be filled with God's Holy Spirit.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. According to each view of the nature of freedom, how is freedom acquired?

1st view:

2nd view:

2. According to each view of the nature of freedom what is the goal of freedom?

1st view:

2nd view:

3. If I believe freedom is the unrestrained ability to realize my own will then I will seek to _____ and the result will be _____.

When would two people who hold this view get along?

4. If I believe freedom is the ability to do God's will then I will seek to _____

and the result will be _____.

When would there be conflict between two people who hold to this view?

From this viewpoint, what would be the only thing that would restrain my freedom?



Remember: From God's perspective freedom is not the ability to do with our lives what we want, but the ability to do with our lives what is right, what God wants. Freedom is the fulfillment of the perfect law. It is the ability to serve God by being led by Christ's Spirit. Freedom is not the absence of the restraint of the law to be able to follow our own desire and feeling; that is slavery to your sin nature. Resisting God and not living according to God's design are the greatest barriers to freedom.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

THE MEASURE OF FREEDOM

Galatians 5:13-15

¹³You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

How can we measure how free we are?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

SELF-EVALUATION

Determine how free you are.

1. Have I given myself over to sinful desires or are my desires Christ's desires?
In what ways?

2. Do I think I need to be able to do what I want or have I submitted myself to God?
How is this demonstrated in your life?

PRAYER

Pray for the continual presence and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in your life, that you would want to do what is right to do and experience freedom in Christ.

THE BASIS OF MORALITY

LESSON 6



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

What is the biblical view of each of the following?

1. Nature of Reality
2. Nature of God
3. Nature of Man
4. Nature of Truth
5. Nature of Freedom

WHAT IS MORALITY?

Morality is conduct based on a set of principles or rules that lead to virtue and well-being. Moral conduct is doing what is good; acting the way we should to achieve contentment, happiness, and fulfillment. Immoral conduct is the opposite of moral conduct, leading to disharmony, dissatisfaction, conflict and anxiety.

COMPETING VIEWS OF THE BASIS OF MORALITY

Natural Law: God has established the universe in harmony with his will. To act morally is to discover God's will by means of our reason and obey him by the use of our will. The natural laws that God has established for how we should live lead us to happiness and fulfillment if we follow them. Natural law is based on what God says is good. God is smarter than we are and we do well to gain his perspective and do things his way.

Utilitarian: Moral good is what brings the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. That which is good for society as a whole is the determiner of what is moral. The utilitarian view is based on what society says is good.

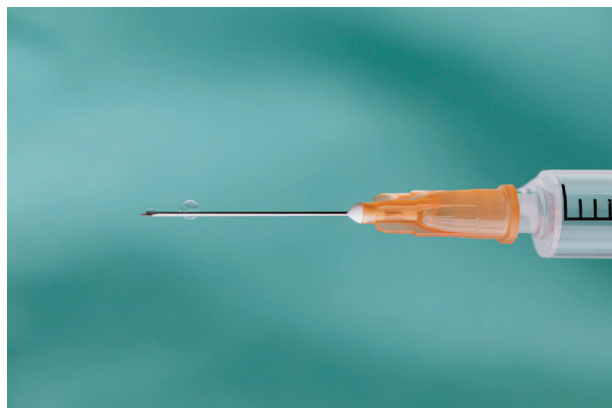
Personal Empowerment: Morality is based in the power to express one's own will, to be one's own moral determiner. Individuals determine what is moral for themselves and what will lead to personal fulfillment. Morality has no foundation or standard outside of the individual will. The personal empowerment view is based on what the individual determines is good.

Illustration: AIDS symposium (An example from Richard's life)

In a symposium on the question, "Is AIDS a Moral Issue?" a philosopher on the panel stated that it is not a moral issue, but rather a health issue. In the question time I addressed the philosopher by saying, "I know we probably won't agree on what is the basis of morality. I hold a biblical perspective in which what God says is good is good and what God says is bad is bad." The philosopher confirmed that she didn't agree with that perspective and I continued. "I think, however, that we might agree with a common good perspective, which holds that whatever is good for society as a whole is good and whatever is bad for society as a whole is bad." I then reasoned, "Since AIDS is bad for society as a whole and since sodomy is the main way AIDS is transmitted, couldn't we then say that sodomy is immoral based on a common good argument."

The philosopher responded, "The problem with your argument is that we no longer consider the common good to be the highest good. We consider the right of individual self-determination to be the highest, greatest good."

What difference does it make to us which view of morality dominates social policy?



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE REASON FOR THE LAW

Deuteronomy 5:29, 33; 6:1-3

⁹Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

³³Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

⁶¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Why did God give us his moral law?

THE CHOICE OF RESPONSE TO GOD'S LAW

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

How are we affected by our response to God's moral law?

THE ESSENCE OF GOD'S MORAL LAW

Matthew 7:12; 22:37-40

¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

³⁷Jesus replied: " `Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: `Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

What is the essence of God's moral law?

OUR MORAL DILEMMA AND THE SOLUTION

Romans 7:21-8:5

²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

1. What is our moral dilemma?

2. What is our moral solution?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANT

Hebrews 8:7-13

⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

1. What is the difference between the Old and New Covenant?

Old -

New -

2. Why was a new covenant necessary?

Summary: God gives us his law to lead us into blessing. God's laws protect us and show us what is right and good. Our problem is that in our sinful nature we can't do what is right on our own. We need to come into a relationship with Christ, be cleansed, and gain a new nature so we want to do what is good and right.



THINKING IT THROUGH

Fill in the chart below on how one's basis of morality affects one's moral decisions.



Note: Utilitarian may be good, bad or neutral depending on one's point of view.

NATURAL LAW	UTILITARIAN	PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT
ABORTION		
HOMOSEXUALITY		
EUTHANASIA		
ADULTERY		

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

FOLLOWING A FOOL

Proverbs 28:26

²⁶He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

Why doesn't a man who determines what is right and what is wrong for himself ever succeed in the end?

THE MEASURE OF MORALITY

1 John 4:7-12

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What is the moral measure of our behavior?

THE BASIS FOR MORALITY

How a person justifies his belief will tell you his basis for morality.

1. The Bible or God says.
2. It is (or isn't) practical.
3. It is my right to decide as long as I am not breaking the law.

How would you argue for a Biblical position against a utilitarian or personal empowerment position?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

SELF-EVALUATION

1. Which view is the basis for my moral decisions?
2. How well do I measure up to God's standard of moral behavior?
3. What needs to change in my basis of morality?

PRAYER

Thank God for his moral law that keeps us safe. Pray that you would clearly see when you are choosing to go your own way apart from God and instead want to do what is right.

THE BASIS OF AUTHORITY

LESSON 7



INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Lessons one through three examined the way things are. State the biblical view of each of the following:

The nature of reality

The nature of God

The nature of man

2. Lessons four through six looked at the way things work. State the biblical view of each of the following:

The nature of truth

The nature of freedom

The basis of morality

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at the basis of authority. Authority is having the power and the right to command the obedience of others. The question is, when does a person have both the power and right to command obedience?

COMPETING VIEWS OF THE BASIS OF AUTHORITY

One view of authority is that the source of authority is from God and authority is legitimate only when it is operating within God's will. If God gives authority then we are obligated to obey it as long as it doesn't function contrary to God's will.

The other view of authority is that the state is the source of authority and authority is only legitimate if it remains within the will of the state. Authority then varies depending on the state.

In terms of the two views of the basis of authority how can ethnic cleansing be opposed unless one can appeal to a higher authority than the state?



Note: Only if there is a God can we complain about what happens within the borders of another country. The Nuremburg Trials acknowledged a higher law in holding Nazis responsible for war crimes committed during World War II.



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE EXTENT OF HUMAN AUTHORITY

Genesis 1:26

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

1. What is the extent of human authority?
2. What is the source of human authority?

THE EXTENT OF FAMILY AUTHORITY

Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites. He gave them this command.

Joshua 24:14-15

¹⁴"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

As God's legitimate leader of Israel, what were the limits of Joshua's authority?

Ephesians 6:1-4

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²"Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

1. What is the authority given to parents?
2. What are the limitations to a parent's authority?

THE EXTENT OF GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

Romans 13:1-7

¹Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore, it is necessary

to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1. What is the responsibility of the individual to the state?
2. What is the authority given to the state?

Acts 5:27-29

²⁷Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

What is the limit of the state's authority?

THE EXTENT OF CHURCH AUTHORITY

Matthew 5:13-14; 28:18-20

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

What is the authority given to the church in the passage?

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What is the authority given to the church in the passage?

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

What is the authority given to the church in the passage?

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What is the authority that God has given to human institutions?

INSTITUTION	EXTENT OF AUTHORITY
FAMILY	
STATE	
CHURCH	

2. What happens if one of those institutions operates outside of the extent of the authority God has given it?
3. What are some examples of the family not functioning properly or not fulfilling its God-given authority?

4. What are some examples of the state operating outside of its God-given authority?

5. What are some historical examples of the church operating outside its God-given authority?

6. What are some examples of the church not fulfilling its responsibilities?



Remember: All authority is derived from God and operates within institutions. The degree to which an institution functions as God designed determines whether there is order, peace and blessing in society

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

AUTHORITY IS SUBJECTED TO GOD

John 19:8-11

⁸When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

¹¹Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

What can you learn about authority from Jesus' response to Pilate?

OUR RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY

Titus 3:1-2

¹Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ²to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

What should be our response to authority?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

SELF-EVALUATION

1. Do I try to exercise authority in areas that are not given to me?

Examples:

2. Do I yield to the legitimate authority over me?

Examples:

PRAYER

Pray for the correct restoration of authority in our society, that people and government officials would recognize their need to submit to God and his truth.



INTRODUCTION

What we believe about life's most fundamental questions sets the course of how we live. What we believe about the way things are and how things work determines the road we choose to travel in life. The road we choose to travel determines our destiny. Therefore, the way we answer the enduring questions can be likened to choosing a course on a road map. In this concluding lesson, you will be evaluating what course you have established based on what you believe about how things are and how they work.

REVIEWING THE SCRIPTURES

1. What is the nature of reality?

Genesis 1:1

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The Biblical View: Reality is supernatural. The natural universe was created by God and is subject to God. God created a world ordered by natural laws, but God himself is not subject to natural law. Miracles happen when God supercedes natural law.

How does our belief in the nature of reality change how we live?

2. What is the nature of God?

Psalm 139:7-10

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

The Biblical View: God is one incorporeal person, who is eternal and the creator.

How does our belief in the nature of God change the way we live?

3. What is the nature of man?

Psalm 51:5

⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

The Biblical View: Man is born with corrupted desires (a sin nature) that give birth to evil behavior.

How does our belief in the nature of man change how we live?

4. What is the nature of truth?

Psalm 43:3

³Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

The Biblical View: Truth is what God reveals and man discovers. We are led by God's truth to God himself.

How does our belief in the nature of truth change how we live?

5. What is the nature of freedom?

James 1:25

²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

The Biblical View: Freedom is being able to do what is right, the internalization of the law so we want to do what is right to do.

How does our belief in the nature of freedom change how we live?

6. What is the basis of morality?

Deuteronomy 5:29

²⁹Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

The Biblical View: What God says is good is good and what God says is bad is bad. God has established how we should live.

How does what we believe is the basis of morality change how we live?

7. What is the basis of authority?

Romans 13:1-2

¹Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

The Biblical View: God is the basis of all authority. Legitimate authority comes from God and to rebel against legitimate authority is to rebel against God.

How does what we believe about the basis of authority change how we live?

THINKING IT THROUGH

WRONG TURNS IN LIFE'S TRAVELS

1. If I believe that all reality is only what I can see or touch then I will only look to h_____ and the m_____ world for help, guidance or meaning.
2. If I believe God is impersonal then I will try to e_____ God's power.
3. If I believe I was born holy then I will bl _____ others for all my troubles.
4. If I believe truth is what I decide it to be then I will not examine anything that c _____ what I want to believe.
5. If I believe freedom is doing what I want then I will be a sl _____ to my evil desires.
6. If I believe I can decide what is good or bad for myself then I will suffer the h_____ of my own folly.
7. If I think that I can reject the authority of anyone I don't agree with then I will live in constant c _____ with those in authority over me.

RIGHT TURNS IN LIFE'S TRAVELS

1. Since reality is supernatural, I will actively seek God's intervention through p _____.
2. Since the nature of God is personal, I will seek to please him through my th _____ and a_____.
3. Since the nature of man is internal corruption, I will pursue biblical sanctification through the u _____ and c _____ of sin.
4. Since the nature of truth is revelation. I will study God's w _____ on a regular basis.
5. Since the nature of freedom is the ability to do what is right, I will seek to i _____ God's law through directing my thoughts to God, meditating on his word, and responding to the Holy Spirit.
6. Since the basis of morality is God's will, I will seek to gain his p _____ and do things his way.
7. Since the basis of authority is God himself, I will humbly s _____ to those God has placed in authority over me.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

As we examine the wrong beliefs that are capturing the minds of people, we need to remember that God is sovereign and his purposes will prevail.

Psalm 37:1-13

¹Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;

²for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

³Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

⁴Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

⁶He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

⁷Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

⁸Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil.

⁹For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

¹⁰A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.

¹¹But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

¹²The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them;

¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.

1. What happens to evil men?
2. What happens to those who trust and delight in the Lord?
3. What does God know about men?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

SELF-EVALUATION

Rank yourself on the following questions: - not very often 0 some + usually

	-	0	+
1. Does my prayer life demonstrate I have a supernatural view of reality?			
2. Does my behavior demonstrate a concern for how I'm affecting God?			
3. Do I examine my own behavior instead of blaming others for things that are wrong?			
4. Am I regularly searching God's word for truth?			
5. Do I desire to gain freedom through conformity to God's will?			
6. Do I yield to God's guidance for moral conduct?			
7. Does my response to authority reveal the humility God desires?			

ANSWERING THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS

Answer the four basic questions of life according to your own beliefs.

1. Where did I come from? (origin)
2. Why am I here? (meaning)
3. What is the right thing to do? (morality)
4. Where am I going? (destiny)

PRAYER

Thank God that he is God. Pray that you would seek to understand more fully who he is and see things as he sees them. Pray for discernment in recognizing what is of him and what isn't.

APPENDIX – LESSON APPLICATIONS

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. Think of examples in advertising that would demonstrate the following views of the nature of reality.

a. Existentialism

b. Naturalism

c. Supernaturalism

2. The content of literature, drama, and poetry reflects a view of reality. The following guidelines can help you determine what that is in the books you are reading to your children.

a. Existentialism

1) Character clues: refusal to recognize the real problem or issues, avoidance of problems, creation of own reality, justification of own behavior, lack of purpose, direction or meaning to life.

2) Example: The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane

Once he thought he had concluded that it would be better to get killed directly and end his troubles. Regarding death thus out of the corner of his eye, he conceived it to be nothing but rest and he was filled with a momentary astonishment that he should have made an extraordinary commotion over the mere matter of getting killed. He would die; he would go to some place where he would be understood. It was useless to expect appreciation of his profound and fine senses from such men as the lieutenant. He must look to the grave for comprehension.

b. Naturalism

1) Character clues: Focus on gaining what need from natural/material world, solutions found in self, control of own destiny, being own person or the person is a victim of circumstances unable to control. Right or wrong is based on circumstances.

2) Examples: The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

It might be true, then, after all, what others had told him about life, that the best powers of a man might not be equal to it! It might be true that, strive as he would, toil as he would, he might fail, and go down and be destroyed! The thought of this was like an icy hand at his heart; the thought that here, in this ghastly home of all horror, he and all those who were dear to him might lie and perish of starvation and cold, and there would be no ear to hear their cry, no hand to help them!

c. Supernaturalism

1) Character clues: humility, recognition of providence, seeking solution outside of self through intervention of God, doesn't have all solutions, demonstration of faith, not required to make sense of everything but doesn't deny reality of problems, acknowledgement of more than natural world.

2) Example: Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe

"Poor critturs!" said Tom, - "what made `em cruel? - and, if I give out, I shall get used to `t, and grow, little by little, just like `em! No, no, Missis! I've lost everything, - wife, and children, and home, and a kind Mas'r, - and he would have set me free, if he'd only lived a week longer; I've lost everything in this world, and it's clean gone, forever, - and now I can't lose Heaven, too; no, I can't get to be wicked, besides all!"

LESSON 2 APPLICATION

Below are some phrases or statements that could represent examples of views of the nature of God. Some might apply to more than one view. Try to find some additional examples.

1. Atheism

"It doesn't matter in the end."

"God doesn't exist, so what's the problem?"

2. Agnosticism

"How can you be sure?"

"Who's to say this is wrong?"

"That's your opinion."

3. Polytheism

"There are many paths to God."

"Thank your lucky stars."

4. Pantheism

"We're no different from the other animals"

"I'll hold a good thought for you."

"May the force be with you."

5. Monotheism

"I'll pray for you."

"We'll put this in God's hands."

"God willing."

LESSON 3 APPLICATION

Below are examples of the view of the nature of man that man is born holy and it is his environment that corrupts him in the following areas: history, education system, and child rearing. Try to find additional examples of the prevailing view of the nature of man in these or other areas.

1. History

In history books and fiction Native Americans are often portrayed as the innocent, noble savage corrupted and exploited by the white man. Although the white man was far from fair in his dealings with the Indians this view fails to recognize the evil that existed within Native American cultures. In looking at the slavery issue the focus is on the moral failing of the colonists and fails to recognize that it was Africans who captured and sold other Africans into slavery. The truth is that all humans are corrupt and it is only the work of Christ in a person that makes him righteous.

2. Education

The German educator Friedrich Froebel who founded the first kindergarten (children's garden) believed that the child is a plan who must be allowed to develop according to his own inner law of organic development. In his view and others like him, the child will spontaneously grow in virtuous behavior without externally imposed training.

3. Child rearing

Modern day discipline revolves more around removing the child from the situation or the temptation from the reach of the child, rather than saying no to the child and then disciplining for disobedience if he continues in the behavior.

4. Other Examples

LESSON 4 APPLICATION

Below are examples of the effect the view of truth as being relative has had on modern educational philosophies. Try to think of others. Contrast the views below with the biblical view found in Psalm 78:1-8 that children need to be understand who God is and what he has done and be taught God's standard or they will become stubborn and rebellious. The goal of classical education was to teach children to conform their lives to eternal principles and transmit a cultural heritage. Modern day education seeks to release a child from outward constraints and traditional standards and allow them to develop new ideas and new ways of doing things.

1. Constructivism – Knowledge is not objective but a social construction, therefore children should not be given the “right” answers but should be taught to construct their own solutions through interaction within a group.
2. Values Clarification (and others like it) – Teachers are not to be directive but to coach students in a process of weighing alternatives and making up their own minds. The process, not the outcome is what is important.
3. Others

LESSON 5 APPLICATION

What are the beliefs in the following areas according to the view held of the nature of freedom and the effects of holding those beliefs?

1 ST VIEW OF FREEDOM	2 ND VIEW OF FREEDOM
MARRIAGE	
CHILD REARING	
EDUCATION	
SOCIETY	

LESSON 7 APPLICATION

Fill out the following chart comparing the right role and function of the institutions with the consequences for the society of that institution acting out side of its authority or not fulfilling its role of authority.

RIGHT ROLE	RESULT	WRONG ROLE	CONSEQUENCE
FAMILY			
GOVERNMENT			
CHURCH			

