

# *WitnessKit 3 God and Religions*

## Class 6

How Did We Arrive at

Postmodernism Historically?

What Is the “Line Of Despair?”

What Was the Path to Moral

Relativism, and How Can We Lead

Someone Back to Moral Objectivity?

# A Verse to Remember:

Romans 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(We renew our minds through reading God’s word regularly.)

# John 8:31b-32

- Jesus said, **“If You abide in My word,**  
**then you are truly disciples of Mine;**  
**and you shall know the truth and the**  
**truth shall make you free.”**

I listened to a chapel speech at a college recently.  
Here is a brief summary of the speech.

*"Doubt is a normal part of spiritual progress."* The speaker studied in England, and spent some time studying one of the theorists for Postmodernism—Jacques Derrida. *Derrida's perspective of language is that it is a game, and that language itself cannot be trusted to communicate. Accordingly, religion or faith is also a language game.* From his encounter with Derrida, the professor needed six months to work through the doubts raised about his faith....

*...He resolved his doubts by  
going*

*Back to Soren Kierkegaard, and realizing that the leap to faith is an all or nothing proposition. He came to grips with the meaning of the cross and the resurrection as an existential truth which makes sense of the suffering in this world.*

*Jesus' wounds demonstrate His experience of suffering. Jesus understands our aches, our griefs, our doubts, our despair, our sense of being forsaken in this world. The professor clings to the fact that Jesus offered Thomas His wounds as evidence of His suffering.*

# The Professor also quoted

St. Anselm, who suggested that *we don't understand in order to believe, but that we believe in order to understand.*

As we believe God's truth, we become able to understand more of it.

So the professor was suggesting *an initial leap of faith, prior to full understanding, in order to understand more.*

# The speaker

- The speaker will not be identified, since the summary in the slides was based upon hearing the speech only once, in person, without access to a transcript. It is an attempt to present a fair summary of his speech.
- It is true that Soren Kierkegaard developed the idea of *the leap of faith*, which is a helpful idea for making a heart commitment to Christ. However, Kierkegaard's meaning for the term is different from the popular idea of its meaning—more about that later in these slides.

# The Bible text for the speech was John 20:24-25.

- **24** Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." John 20:24-25 (NKJV)



# Jesus Christ and Evidence

My comments:

- Jesus Christ Himself offered evidence of the facts in this moment. He presented evidence both of the cross, in His scars, and of His resurrection, by His living Presence.
- He asked Thomas to believe based upon two things: the testimony of Thomas' trustworthy friends, and the evidence he saw before him. The belief Jesus requested from Thomas was reality-based.

# Another Reference of Interest

- An additional reference that blends with St. Anselm's idea is John 16:13. "When He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."
- Being willing to receive the Holy Spirit into one's life is a step of faith that leads to understanding more truth—because God works toward that purpose.

# Another reference

which reinforces some of the true statements in the speech is Hebrews 4:14-16. “Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (of faith in Him). For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need.”

# God's intervention to end suffering reaches beyond this world.

Presenting the suffering of Christ as an existential Truth which makes sense of the suffering in this world is only a starting point. In the cross, in the visible agony of Christ, and in His wounds remaining after the resurrection, we can see that God hates suffering. That is helpful for making sense of the suffering in this world while believing in the goodness of God.

Much more can be seen there as well. That is only a starting point.

# It is important to remember this.

Jesus Christ willingly suffered in our place on the cross. John chapter 10 reports His words.

“The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. ...I lay down My life for My sheep. ... No one has taken it from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

He was not a victim. He was Victor. He became victorious over sin and death and hell by suffering willingly in our place. He proved His victory by rising from the dead.

# In the cross,

We can see that God wants to spare us suffering, including any that is due us in the sense of ultimate justice for our misdeeds. He not only wants to spare us undeserved suffering—which we would expect from a good God—He also wants to spare us **deserved** suffering.

This is a shocking idea. And yet, we all need this to be true. God hates all suffering, even justice-based suffering.

God allows evil to occur in this world.  
In the cross, we see suffering.

God's power is validated in the resurrection—He does not allow suffering in this world because of some sort of weakness that prevents fighting evil. He vanquished death itself in the aftermath of the cross.

We owe God our trust because He demonstrated His perfect righteousness by taking our suffering for us.

# The spiritual reality of the cross

- Is a complicated reality. There is nothing simplistic about it. It goes to the heart of the question of suffering in this world. It goes to the core of our quest to understand why God allows so much suffering. He proved through the cross that He hates suffering. He wants to limit suffering.
- And it shows, through the resurrection, that His answers reach into eternity. His eternal covenant is real, for each individual.



# The cross is not a SUBJECTIVE

Existential truth, but an OBJECTIVE truth. It is real. It counts forever. The leap of faith is a very small but thorough leap, because the truth of God's good character is visible to us in the cross. The truth of His power is evident in the resurrection.

# The cross is not SUBJECTIVE.

The real leap of faith is more like trusting your Father to catch you when as a child you jump from the side of the swimming pool as you first learn to swim. It is NOT like jumping off a cliff in the dark and just hoping against hope that God is there.

Kierkegaard's use of the term was more like that leap in the dark. Francis Schaeffer explains why in *The God Who Is There*.

# So how did we get to this place,

Where existential truth—

which can mean a range of things

from subjective opinion

to an experience which cannot be  
communicated in words

to a truth that is real enough to be  
experienced—

*where existential truth is used as a filter to  
understand the Bible?*

# So how did we get to this place?

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Why would Kierkegaard be a good scholar to consider, when challenged by postmodernist Derrida's circular language games that form a prison of meaninglessness?

# Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard is the hinge scholar who brought philosophical existentialism into the modern Christian world. He used the leap of faith idea as a bridge between philosophical existentialism and faith. There are serious problems with that approach, but those problems are not obvious at first.

Philosophical Existentialism as a method opens Christianity to Postmodernism as a worldview.

Francis Schaeffer explains how it all came about.

One of the factors that brought us to this place was...

**Eliminating** the first three chapters of Genesis from discussion as descriptions of reality.

The shift to evolutionary naturalism as an undergirding philosophical base effectively sidelined Genesis. Treating Genesis as myth removes its real explanatory power.

# Why is Genesis important?

The first few chapters of Genesis explain God's goodness in a fallen world, and allow us to consider many more topics as we travel through the scriptures, all with the foundational idea that God IS GOOD.

Without knowing a reason to believe God is good, the suffering in the world acts as a screen which hides His goodness.

Going directly toward understanding the cross and resurrection restores reason to believe God is good. However, this skips the explanatory power of the Old Testament. It detaches Christianity from its roots.

# The Roots of Christianity

An Enlightenment Theist worldview which includes the Old Testament holds a moral basis for law and a framework for understanding the real world. The Old Testament reveals boundaries around evil that God wants cultures to keep in place—such as protecting the lives of the innocent. We assume this is obvious to everyone, but when we look around the world at human suffering, many governments do not assume that innocent lives should be protected in law.



# The Old Testament

- In the Old Testament, God judges nations after their failure to protect innocent life in their laws. This emphasizes the importance of human rights in law. We should take these ideas seriously.
- The Ten Commandments hold human leaders accountable to moral standards. The Ten Commandments hold human law accountable to moral standards.
- Majority rule can protect minority rights only if moral standards stand above humanly produced law.

# The Roots of Christianity

Disregarding the principles of the Old Testament makes the New Testament less understandable, and also reduces the moral stability of legal reasoning.

The New Testament took place under Roman Tyranny, and dealt with surviving that more than with establishing just laws. Christians expected to suffer under Roman Tyranny, and that expectation proved correct.

If only the New Testament affects your understanding of law, that understanding will be inadequate.

# Enlightenment Theism

The US Constitution was written with an Enlightenment Theism base. It did not fulfill its potential on human rights because of its pragmatism toward slavery—the area where it abandoned its idealism.

Nonetheless, it DID establish the rule of law, with an understanding of moral standards' being above human law. The Bill of Rights reflects that understanding, by attempting to limit government's reach in matters of human rights.

Religion informed political philosophy.

# The Twentieth Century was a WORDLVIEW TRANSITION century.

The history of religious ideas in the twentieth century is tremendously important. Over the course of that century, vastly different worldviews became prominent around the world, and some became agencies for the rise of various forms of violent totalitarianism.

The stability of the West with its Enlightenment Theism was challenged and attacked by the rise of the Nazis, the Communists, and by a blurring of the lines of belief from within—leading eventually to Postmodernism.

# The Twentieth Century was a WORDLVIEW TRANSITION century.

- Postmodernism attempts to stand for human rights without an Enlightenment Theist basis, and it does so by fragmenting law into cultural group desires.
- In the twentieth century, philosophy began to modify religion. That modification produced feedback into political philosophy. It also produced political instability.
- We see the political instability, and it helps to understand the ideas behind it. The connection between ideas and instability is not obvious, but it is real.

# We can understand how the West came under the influence of modernism and postmodernism

## The historic progression of ideas in the West

By studying the historic progression of ideas from the 1800s to the present:

1. **The shift from classic logic to a dialectical relativism**
2. The discovery of limits in logical positivism and linguistic analysis
3. The search for meaning through existentialism
4. The hinge from philosophy to religion in Kierkegaard's leap of faith.

# The shift from classic logic to a dialectical relativism

Classic logic is *thought* keyed to *objective reality*. If you have an object occupying a certain space on a table, it is not possible to have the total absence of the same object occupying the same space at the same time. A is not Non-A. This reflection of physical reality is a starting point for classic logic.

Classic logic assumes **objective reality exists**. It operates under rules that work for objective reality. It works to explain cause and effect.

# Hegel came up with a different idea...

Rather than A and Non-A, Hegel made truth relative. He attempted to cut *truth* free from *logic*. He considered reality to be composed of syntheses of opposing opinions, where the each synthesis comes about from the conflict between thesis and antithesis. Truth itself became the subjective result of power struggle rather than an objective reflection of reality.

But then, how does a person KNOW anything to be true? The dialectic dissolves truth into opinion. The dialectic creates an impossible epistemology.



# Hegel came up with a different idea...

Soviet Communism was built upon atheism and the dialectic. Without overarching truths to hold leaders accountable, the rule became corrupt and violent. In each nation where communism spread, state-sponsored violence against dissent became the norm. Mass starvation was used in the Ukraine, to bring farmers into submission. Mass starvation was used in Ethiopia, with similar goals, and in Cambodia, and in other locations.

# Hegel came up with a different idea...

The cultural revolution in China used mass violence against perceived enemies of the state. For example, a gifted young pianist had her hands smashed for playing western classical music.

The dialectic fails to reveal when goals are reached. The atheist state has no moral boundaries. The world has suffered beyond description **in many hidden places** because the dialectic replaced logic in political systems. Logic needs universals.

# The dusty archives of historical thought

Have terribly serious and long-range impacts.

Understanding this is worth our time and effort, because the same processes are at work in the present, even by different names.

Enlightenment Theism has real hope for the real world. We need to show the way back to it.

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# The discovery of limits in logical positivism and linguistic analysis

Logical positivism tried to cut philosophy loose from the objective Ideals of Plato, by considering **the universals** as mere definitions. Logical positivism tried to precisely define words—in order to connect mental processes to objective reality. However, words can only beget words. The assumptions that connected philosophy to objective reality were found to be simple connotations that were holdovers from the classic view (Plato's ideals, applied in Enlightenment Theism) they were trying to escape.

# The discovery of limits in logical positivism and linguistic analysis

Without believing in a Mind of God, no source was found for the universals. Logical positivism reached a dead end.

It was followed by what Schaeffer calls *the defining philosophy*, which I believe is now called *linguistic analysis*. Linguistic analysis transitioned Modernism into Postmodernism.

Schaeffer wrote before Postmodernism was well defined, but he foresaw its development.

# The discovery of limits in logical positivism and linguistic analysis

In Postmodernism, truth is considered a construct of language specific to a language group, and unrelated to objective reality. Objective reality is thought **not** to actually exist.

Postmodernism has a CONSTRUCTIVIST view of reality—that language actually **creates** reality.

When applied politically, this cuts politics free from facts. That produces instability—because reality exists and does not conform to politics.

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# The search for meaning through philosophical existentialism

The optimism of logical positivism still holds sway in Modernism. Modernists think objective reality exists for the physical world, but not for the world of intangibles such as souls and morals and meaning in life.

(Some of particle physics is challenging to Modernism, as particles within the atom are dissected into more and tinier pieces, with less connection to the physical world we see.)

# The search for meaning through philosophical existentialism

Francis Schaeffer called the line between objective reality and the realm assumed to be irrational subjectivity the “line of despair.” Modernists draw the line between objective reality and subjective irrationality, dividing the entire emotional, religious, and social realms from objectivity. They relegate objectivity to physical reality alone. They have created despair of finding objective truth in the most important realms of life.

# The search for meaning through philosophical existentialism

The Enlightenment Theist does not have such a line of despair. Objective truth extends into all parts of life. Nothing demands an irrational response in order to have meaning. The Enlightenment Theist worldview is coherent, where the other common worldviews are not.

(This coherence is a hint that it matches reality.)

# The search for meaning through existentialism

Postmodernism agrees with Modernism that objective reality is not possible for the world of intangibles such as souls and morals and meaning in life.

Postmodernists extend that skepticism of objective reality to the physical world as well. So Postmodernism's line of despair is even more severe than Modernism's.

# The search for meaning through existentialism

**So where is meaning to be found for the  
Modernist and the Postmodernist?**

It is theoretically found in the subjective and irrational world of the emotions, via an ***existential experience***, which typically cannot be communicated in words to anyone else.

# The search for meaning through existentialism

All meaning in life is relegated to a non-verbal, irrational, emotional experience of some sort. This makes the most important things in life totally subjective and generally unable to be shared with others. This makes meaning in life an isolated experience. It makes self-fulfillment more important than old-fashioned ideas like duty—duty implying that standards are involved in the value of one's life.

# The search for meaning through existentialism

Three schools of existentialism (Swiss, French, and German) held some variation in the form of experience that gives meaning to life.

- The **Swiss school** thought that such an experience should simply be waited for. The most that could be said about it afterward was “I’ve had an experience.”

# The search for meaning through existentialism

The **French school** thought one could make the experience happen by making a choice. The choice had to be made without any rational reason, and had to be a choice that could go in any direction—without moral considerations which were considered invalid.



# The search for meaning through existentialism

The **German school** thought such an experience consisted of floating anxiety without basis in reality.

The most pronounced attribute of these forms of finding meaning is their own meaninglessness.  
What could be less meaningful than floating anxiety?

The lostness of these worldviews is a lostness of the person's own sense of value.

# The search for meaning through existentialism

The **Fringe** advocated drug use to obtain the existential experience.

(PLEASE NOTE! A venture into self-destructive behavior is really a bad way to look for a meaningful life.)

All these “line of despair” answers point out how empty life is without God. God becomes the integration point we need – the One who really does **give** life meaning—the One who pulls our lives together and makes us whole.

# The search for meaning through existentialism

*The God Who Is There* was written long ago. People are not openly advocating these methods of finding meaning, but they ARE advocating seeking pleasure, seeking self-fulfillment, making self the center of the life. Staying busy, seeking job success, living vicariously through the next generation's successes, political activism—all these things are just as fleeting as the “floating anxiety” experience. But people are eternal beings, with eternal value and meaning. We need an answer that accesses eternity.

# The good news is that the university philosophy departments

Have become somewhat open to Enlightenment Theism again, having reached Postmodernism, which tends to dissolve philosophy as a discipline. However, the remaining departments of the universities do not yet welcome Theistic thought.

Philosophical existentialism is respectable in most departments of the universities. So often one will encounter such an approach to religion in the universities.

# We can understand how the West came under the influence of modernism and postmodernism

## The historic progression of ideas in the West

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# The hinge from philosophy to religion in Kierkegaard's leap of faith

Soren Kierkegaard was a Theist and a Trinitarian. However, he started a trend of applying existential methods to religious belief, because he could not understand the Genesis account of Abraham's presentation of his son to God, followed by the substitution of the ram as sacrifice.

(Placing that account in context, and studying the New Testament explanation, both are great helps in comprehending the account, thereby relieving the reader of apprehensions about the goodness of God or the truth of the Bible.)

# The hinge from philosophy to religion in Kierkegaard's leap of faith

The account of Abraham's offering of Isaac, with God's provision of the substitutionary lamb, is one of the most challenging passages in the Bible to understand.

The Bible holds a number of difficult passages, and it holds many thousands of obvious truths. SO it is wiser to base one's faith on the obvious truths than on the difficult passages.

If you try to understand this passage without accepting miracle accounts as real and rare events, it makes no moral sense.

# Here is what happened.

- God promised Abraham a miracle son, of his very old age, after his wife Sarah was past childbearing age. At least fourteen years went by—and Sarah was still childless. God further promised that this son would become the patriarch of a nation God would make great, and that Abraham's descendants would be too numerous to count.
- And then Isaac miraculously was born.



# Here is what happened.

- And then, years later, God said for Abraham to give Isaac up as a sacrifice. Isaac was a youth at the time and Abraham was a very old man. Abraham followed through on God's directions by taking Isaac up to a mountain. Isaac asked about the animal for sacrifice, and Abraham said "*God will provide the lamb.*" And God did provide, a young ram caught in a thicket. Isaac's cooperative spirit is also amazing—so even though the Bible does not talk about it, Isaac was being tested as well as Abraham.

# So here are the moral issues.

- Why did God give Abraham such a terrible command in the first place? Why did Abraham follow through? Why was God pleased that Abraham followed through? What message was God trying to communicate through this tableau? How does it reflect God's goodness, knowing that human sacrifice is a terrible evil? Human sacrifice was the terrible evil for which God judged the Canaanites later, and even later, the nation of Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity. What a difficult passage! How can it be understood?

# The hinge from philosophy to religion in Kierkegaard's leap of faith.

- Kierkegaard chose not to take the reality-of-miracles-in-context approach, but instead to attribute to logic either dishonesty in the account or doubts about God's goodness. He chose an irrational leap of faith away from logic to believe God's goodness and the account, in a **synthesis of antithetical ideas**, because he could not reconcile the account with God's goodness.
- This was a mistake.

# Kierkegaard should, instead, have studied the context:

Schaeffer brings out the fact that Abraham had good reasons to trust God—

- Isaac was a miracle baby of promise from God, born when Sarah was past the age of childbearing.
- God had promised that Isaac's descendants would outnumber the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore.
- Thus Isaac had to live through the experience. Abraham knew that.

# Kierkegaard should, instead, have studied the context:

- Abraham spoke one logical option for that at the time—*“God will provide for Himself the lamb.”* In fact, that is what God did, with a ram caught in a thicket. Abraham’s answer *suggests* that he realized this was a test.
- The other option was resurrection.
- Both options are intertwined in the atonement of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was the Substitute Lamb for the sins of others. He was not defeated, but rose from the dead.
- The New Testament, after almost 2000 years, finally explains what was going on. What a long time to wait for an explanation!

Kierkegaard should, instead, have studied the entire Bible for clues:

- Hebrews 11:17-19 “By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”
- In addition, Abraham received a sense of God’s provision, as he named that location *The Lord Will Provide*.

# Kierkegaard should, instead, have studied the entire Bible for clues:

This reveals God's purposes for the test:

1. To test Abraham's trust.
2. To lead Abraham to understand the idea of resurrection, accomplished symbolically in the substitution of the animal sacrifice, so that Abraham received Isaac back symbolically as a type of Messiah's resurrection.
3. To lead Abraham to understand the idea of substitutionary atonement—that God provides a substitute, so that human sacrifice is prohibited—Jeremiah 19:4-5.

# The idea of the resurrection

- The Old Testament has several references to the resurrection of the righteous and of the wicked. God revealed that the “Seed of the Woman would crush the serpent’s head” just before pronouncing the reality of death due to sin in Genesis chapter 3. That is the first hint of the possibility of victory over death.
- This tableau with Abraham and Isaac is the second hint.
- Later passages in Job, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel give confirmation and more detail.



# Kierkegaard should, instead, have studied the entire Bible for clues:

- Only God could provide the perfect sacrifice for us in the person of His Son/ Himself, because only God—not another human being—has the right to decide about someone's death, and the Judge Himself died in our place so that we would never have to die eternally.
- The only acceptable sacrifice humans can offer to God is to offer oneself as a **living** sacrifice for service in this **life**—according to Romans 12:1-2 and also seen in the Old Testament acceptance of the **Levites as God's servants** to substitute for the firstborn of Israel in Numbers 3:40-51.

# Which is better-- to accept difficult truths, or to leap into irrationality?

These concepts are difficult but not **IRRATIONAL**. They require faith, but not irrational faith. What they really demand is a careful search for truth, and not jumping to conclusions.

Sometimes when we are faced with a difficult question, it is wise to wait and search for more light from the Scriptures, rather than coming to a superficial conclusion.

God gave us logical minds and He cannot want us to choose irrationality.

# Which is better-- to accept difficult truths, or to leap into irrationality?

It is also true that we must trust God with our family members—that we cannot allow their troubles to make us distrust God. When you think of allowing a son or daughter to go into military service, or missionary service in a dangerous part of the world, THAT requires trusting God with their future.

If a son or daughter is struck by serious illness and even death, we must trust God with their eternal future.

# Which is better-- to accept difficult truths, or to leap into irrationality?

We can be comforted that God does not expect the same test from us that He demanded from Abraham, (and we don't have the same promises and miracles Abraham had beforehand to protect his decision) but we can realize that we must trust God no matter what happens.

The themes of the Bible are threaded through the entire text. The entire text forms a coherent whole.

# When we look at the existentialist answers to meaning in life

- Their answers look meaningless.
- When we look to the Bible's answers to meaning in life, the answers are amazingly consistent and up to date. The Bible's answers match our drive to find purpose by giving us an eternal purpose—to find eternal life and to bring as many other people into that certainty of eternal life as possible on the human side – and to have real friendship with our LORD that will last forever. What an amazing privilege!

# So let's talk about leaps of faith.

Does God require a leap of faith since He requires that we have faith in order to please Him?

God requires commitment to His goodness and trust in His good character and humility to face one's own failures and seek His mercy. None of these requirements is an *irrational* leap of faith, but each one is a step of faith.

# Proverbs 22:17-21

- “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may correctly answer to Him who sent you?”

# This passage is considerably different from a blind leap of faith.

- Searching for the certainty of the words of truth, from the wise, leads to trust in the LORD.
- The Scriptural pattern is to search for truth, especially to search for truth in God's word, and then to take an appropriate step of faith.



# This passage is considerably different from a blind leap of faith.

- God required Sabbath keeping for the purpose of regular time in His word. Isaiah 56:4-5 indicates that obtaining an everlasting name is the goal of Sabbath keeping. So the search for God is not an instantaneous event, but needs time and thoughtfulness.
- This does not mean you automatically go to hell for not keeping the Sabbath. It means God has a purpose for Sabbath keeping, and He wants you to fulfill that purpose. Sabbath keeping is not an arbitrary rule, but is meaningful and important.

# What I see in the Scriptures...

- What God requires is not an irrational leap of faith, but rather a truth-seeking persevering faith.
- He requires priority in our lives—regular time in His word, thoughtful consideration of His precepts, willing commitment when we understand the next step He wants us to take, a true wish to be a citizen of His kingdom.

# The speech I heard at the college

- Revealed a faith that had to persevere and work through bewilderment. The speech revealed a faith that looked for a reason to keep persevering—and the understanding of the suffering of Christ on the cross, and the evidence of those wounds held out to Thomas, provided that reason.

# The Existentialist approach to faith holds more than one danger—such as

- A danger of using existential methods to try to find the lowest level of faith one can get by with—of avoiding a real search for truth and taking an irrational leap instead. This is a danger because the faith described in the Bible is a truth-based faith, and not irrational at all. God want us to be whole-hearted.

# The Existentialist approach to faith holds more than one danger—such as

- We are often motivated to stop short of the Biblical view of faith because it is unpopular—it is seen as intolerant to believe your own view is THE truth. But Biblical faith by definition is faith in what you believe is true.
- Biblical faith is not intolerant, because it is open to all, and it is a faith from the heart. It is a faith that desires the best for everyone. God's love desires the best for everyone.
- Human decisions are important to God.

# The Existentialist approach to faith holds more than one danger—

- The existentialist approach can lead to a danger of thinking all religions equal (and equally irrational) in achieving religious truth. While all religions may hold some diverse beliefs that are true, all religions are not equal in their overall closeness to spiritual reality. Spiritual reality is one aim of true religion.
- The existentialist approach can lead to a mushy view of religious truth, where nobody can criticize religious experiences on the basis of Biblical, objective truth.

# The Existentialist approach to faith holds more than one danger—

- Another danger is elevating existentialist theory above God's word—because existentialism does not have a method for finding truth.
- The Bible does have a method for finding truth. The method is rigorous. That sets it apart from other religious texts.

# What about God's Opinion?

- An existentialist approach to religion feeds moral relativism. Philosophical existentialism views religion as irrational but a source of meaning due to emotional benefits. It does not view religion as a reliable source for moral standards.



# What about God's Opinion?

- One of the important tasks of religion is to define right and wrong. Across the world, many opinions exist about right and wrong. Many opinions exist about **God's opinions** about right and wrong. They cannot all be right. But treating them as all equal seems tolerant, and tolerance seems good.

# What about God's Opinion?

- The popular answer is to assume that everything is just opinion, so one opinion is as good as another. This leads directly to moral relativism, with no universal standards. This solution is seriously flawed.

# God's Opinion

- The first flaw is that it offends the real God who exists—it treats His real opinion as unknowable, whereas He requires that we search to find it.

# God's Opinion

- The second flaw is that it offends our inborn sense of right and wrong. When groups develop moral judgments based upon their own desire for power over others, and then crush their opposition, THAT opinion about right and wrong offends basic human decency. Yet we see that sort of thing often in human history. Our basic sense of injustice demonstrates the existence of over-arching standards.

# God's Opinion

- Human history is tumultuous, and the tumults often start with a wish to reform a systematic violation of standards of right and wrong.
- All these matters are indicators that universal moral standards do exist—that God's opinion about right and wrong is real and important and knowable. Religions have an imperative to search for the real Source for defining right and wrong.

# God's Opinion

- The individual has an imperative to search for the best religion. The best religion will have clear standards of right and wrong that are workable in the real world—that bring benefits to humanity.

# On a personal level

- The WitnessKit courses are designed to bring definition to that search—to help you zoom into the true one, even if far away. Biblical Christianity is it.
- But churches can call themselves Christian without being Biblical. If their approach is primarily philosophical existentialism, they will have a weak hold on Biblical truth. It is important to be able to identify that problem, and look for a better source of teaching and fellowship.

# The danger of looking for the minimal level of faith as a safety net.

- We shortchange ourselves when we take an existentialist approach. The Bible does not clearly define the minimum level of faith to get one's name in the Lamb's book of life. A search for truth is best, followed by real and solid commitment.
- We know from God's word what is certain to keep our names there—repentance of sins, accepting the atonement Christ offers us, receiving His Holy Spirit into our lives, accepting His Kingdom in our hearts, following Christ. Those are objective truths, not subjective.



# Doubts

- You do not have to be free of all doubts to make a real commitment. You should be free enough of doubts to believe the commitment is rational. Because God is real, He meets that kind of commitment with blessings—He makes life better. As you gradually open the whole of life to His kind Presence, those blessings will increase.
- Life may not actually get EASIER, because the other worldviews are not kind to Enlightenment Theism. But it will get BETTER.

## 2. The Danger of Thinking All Religions Are Equivalent

- The message of our entire course of study has been that worldviews are NOT all the same. Ideas have consequences, including eternal consequences. It is very much in our best interest to find the faith that is the best match with objective spiritual reality.
- I believe Biblical Christianity is the only religion that meets such a test. God demands that we search for truth in this matter, and He will judge us in perfect fairness regarding that search.

## 2. The Danger of Thinking All Religions Are Equivalent

- It is tremendously important to make a careful search for oneself and then commit to truth. References in the WitnessKit courses form a list of books that will help in the search, starting with the Bible, and the textbooks for the courses.
- It is tremendously important not to use existentialism as a filter that would dull or fog the truth of the Bible.

If we are willing to search for truth,

God is willing and able to help us find it.

In Hosea 6:6 (NASB) God says *“For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”* God is pleased by our persevering search for Him. He delights in our knowledge of Him.

# What about God's Grace?

- All of this is really about God's Grace. We have to meet His prerequisites to be able to find His Grace, even though it is available all along.

God has already provided His Grace in the Good Shepherd's willingness to lay down His life for us. He is ready to receive us into His flock when we are willing to take the steps of faith to follow Him.

He gives us eternal life and eternal fellowship with Him freely—we do not have to earn it. We DO have to understand it well enough to receive that lovely gift.

# Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

Thus says the LORD God,  
“I Myself  
Will search for My sheep.  
I will deliver them  
From all the places  
Where they were scattered  
On a cloudy, gloomy day.

# Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

I will bring them out.

I will gather them.

I will bring them home.

I will feed them--

in good pasture

by streams of water.

I will lead them to rest....

# Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

I will seek the lost.

I will bring back the scattered.

I will bandage the broken.

I will strengthen the sick.

I will feed the wicked--with judgment.

I will remove the trampers who cause harm.

My flock will no longer be in danger.

My Son will be their Shepherd.

I will make them a blessing.

I am with them and they are Mine.





# Homework

3 sets

# Homework Week 6 Day 1

- Read Matthew 7:7-14 and 21-27.
- What are the relative numbers of those who find the way of life versus those who find the way of destruction?
- What two things does Jesus say in verses 21-27 are involved in building a life upon the proper foundation?

# Homework Week 6 Day 1

- In Revelation 21:7-8, those whose names are in the book of life are described as those who overcome. What are some things they overcome?
- Let's begin Francis Schaeffer's THE GOD WHO IS THERE, found as the first book of the FRANCIS A. SCHAEFFER TRILOGY. Read the Foreword and Introduction, found on pages xi through 2.

# Homework Week 6 Day 1

- How did Packer describe Schaeffer's approach to apologetics?
- Packer states that moral relativism "has victimized people across the board." What do you think he meant by that statement?
- In the Preface, Schaeffer discusses the overlap between **THE GOD WHO IS THERE** and **ESCAPE FROM REASON**. Why did he opt to keep both books rather than to combine them into one?
- What did Schaeffer say modern people need in place of the "leap of faith" dichotomy he will discuss in the books?

# Homework Week 6 Day 2

- Read Ephesians 2: 1-10 and Galatians 3:24.
- How is it possible to reconcile judgment based upon our deeds with salvation by grace through faith alone apart from works?
- Read Chapter One, “The Gulf Is Fixed,” in **THE GOD WHO IS THERE.**

# Homework Week 6 Day 2

- What were the approximate years for a shift in the way of thinking in Europe and the United States?
- What is epistemology?
- What did the shift in thinking involve? The purpose of THE GOD WHO IS THERE is to develop an understanding of the path to moral relativism, and how to get back to truth.
- If God exists, where is the line between murder and neutral “choice“ for the unborn?

# Homework Week 6 Day 2

- Why does Schaeffer think the church was not prepared for the change in thinking?
- Why does Schaeffer call the timing of the shift in thinking *the line of despair*?
- What was the sequence in academic disciplines that adopted the new methodology?
- What was the sequence in geographic spread?
- What problem did Schaeffer mention due to the fragmentation in education, as students study for specific jobs? Does Postmodernism solve the problem or make it worse?

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- Sometimes one hears people say the Old Testament does not talk about eternal life. Let's look at two passages that relate to that question. Read Psalm 147: 1-10 and Ecclesiastes 12:7.
- What is the theme of this Psalm?
- In verses 4 and 5 of the Psalm, what happens to the spirit of mortal man upon death?
- In Ecclesiastes 12:7, where does that spirit go?
- What happens to a man's thoughts on earth when he dies?
- What reasons are given for trusting God?



# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- Read THE GOD WHO IS THERE, Chapter Two, “The First Step in the Line of Despair: Philosophy.”
- When did Hegel live?
- What radical new way of approaching truth did Hegel develop?
- When did Kierkegaard live and what did he contribute to the discussion?
- The flow of thought from Kierkegaard went toward existentialism in philosophy and toward a point of view called neo-orthodoxy in theology. This chapter focuses on existentialism. In 1968 when the book was written, there were three schools of existential thought. What were they, and how were they alike and different?

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- When Christians use the word “lost,” they usually mean a condition of helplessness in failure to keep God’s perfect moral law, and a need for atonement for sins. When dealing with existentialists who deny that anything rational can be known about God, a whole new kind of lost-ness appears – being lost as to meaning in existence or reason for any of the things that seemingly should matter the most.

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- A real existentialist may grapple with questions about why he should believe he is not just a figment of imagination or a dream or illusion. How can he prove he is actually alive and perceiving the things he seems to perceive? Why do any of his choices have meaning? The relegation of all religion and meaning in life to the irrational realm has the effect of placing people in this new kind of lost-ness.
- What is logical positivism and what problem does it have?
- What is the defining philosophy according to Schaeffer?

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- Dr. Schaeffer was writing just as the Postmodern form was taking hold through the doorway of linguistic analysis and literary criticism. We have just reviewed the theories that have dominated that field in Gene Edward Veith's POSTMODERN TIMES.

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

What did Schaeffer say existentialism, and eastern mysticism, and Timothy Leary's advocacy of dangerous illegal drug use have in common?

- God gave us our minds. God LOVES our minds and wants to make them clear in thoughtfulness. He is the source of everything good. The use of dangerous substances is utterly wrong. The fact that the existential approach to meaning in life led toward such horrible mistakes—that fact should prove to us that philosophical existentialism is the wrong way to go! The real God has real answers. Philosophical existentialism has big mistakes.

# Homework Week 6 Day 3

- One of the lessons of the first three chapters of Genesis is the following: God does not want us to know evil by experience. He wants us to recognize evil and avoid it.
- We do not have to experiment with things that are harmful to our thinking processes. We can recognize that God loves our minds and wants to protect them.
- That principle carries over into many different choices, including forms of entertainment and forms of religion.