

**LESSON FIFTEEN – THOUGHT PROVOKING QUESTIONS**  
**SECULAR HUMANISM**

I. What is secular humanism?

A. When the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras wrote, “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are, and things that are not, that they are not,” he was attempting to state his conviction that truth is relative.

1. He had no idea that he would become the “patron saint” of a 20<sup>th</sup> century movement called “secular humanism.”
2. Although secular humanism became stronger in the 20th century, naturalism’s growth really started its modern growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*.
3. By the 1960’s conservative Christianity began to view the danger as much broader, as coming from a more alluring and external force – secularism, later called secular humanism (or scientific humanism), a full-fledged alternative to religion per se.
4. This social force, said to be predicated upon the twin doctrines of atheism and evolution as well as upon an amoral way of life appealing to humanity’s baser instincts (permissiveness, promiscuity, pornography, feminism, etc.), seemed to have usurped cultural authority.
5. By controlling the media and the educational establishment and wielding influence upon the intrusive federal government, secular humanism was spreading its superficial credo into every nook and cranny and drawing in the naïve masses.

B. Definitions.

1. Neutral definitions of humanism establish that humanism is not necessarily anti-God.
  - a) In the Renaissance era, the word emphasized the importance of man, not to the exclusion of God, but simply with little emphasis on God.
  - b) Humanism is sometimes defined as the study of the worth and dignity of man as such worth is given him by God.

c) Webster: any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, or dignity predominate.

d) Others may think of a liberal arts education.

2. These definitions are well and good, but what we are seeking is a definition of the worldview known as Secular Humanism.

a) Secular humanism holds that man is the standard by which all of life is measured and judged; values, law, justice, good, beauty, and right or wrong are all to be judged by man-made rules with no credence to either God or the Bible.

b) *The Dictionary of Philosophy* defines philosophical humanism as “[a] philosophy that (a) regards the rational individual as the highest value; (b) considers the individual to be the ultimate source of value; and (c) is dedicated to fostering the individual’s creative and moral development in a meaningful and rational way without reference to concepts of the supernatural.”

## II. What are the characteristics of secular humanism?

A. Secular humanism is a collection of ideas that bind together into a coherent system.

1. First, Secular Humanism is a worldview. That is, it is a set of beliefs through which one interprets all of reality—something like a pair of glasses.

2. Second, Secular Humanism is a *religious* worldview. Do not let the word "secular" mislead you. The Humanists themselves would agree that they adhere to a religious worldview. According to the *Humanist Manifestos I & II*: Humanism is "a philosophical, religious, and moral point of view."

a) Not all humanists, though, want to be identified as "religious," because they understand that religion is (supposedly) not allowed in American public education. To identify Secular Humanism as a religion would eliminate the Humanists' main vehicle for the propagation of their faith.

b) And it *is* a faith, by their own admission. The *Humanist Manifestos* declare: "These affirmations [in the *Manifestos*] are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing *faith*."

## III. What are the tenets (basic beliefs) of secular humanism?

A. Theologically, Secular Humanists are *atheists*.

1. Humanist Paul Kurtz, publisher of Prometheus Books and editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, says that "Humanism cannot in any fair sense of the word apply to one who still believes in God as the source and creator of the universe."
2. Corliss Lamont agrees, saying that "Humanism contends that instead of the gods creating the cosmos, the cosmos, in the individualized form of human beings giving rein to their imagination, created the gods."

B. Philosophically, Secular Humanists are *naturalists*. That is, they believe that nature is all that exists - the material world is all that exists. There is no God, no spiritual dimension, no afterlife. Carl Sagan said it best in the introduction to his *Cosmos* series: "The universe is all that is or ever was or ever will be." Roy Wood Sellars concurs. "Humanism is naturalistic," he says, "and rejects the supernaturalistic stance with its postulated Creator-God and cosmic Ruler."

C. Secular Humanist beliefs in the area of biology are closely tied to both their atheistic theology and their naturalist philosophy. If there is no supernatural, then life, including human life, must be the result of a purely natural phenomenon. Hence, Secular Humanists must believe in *evolution*. Julian Huxley, for example, insists that "man ... his body, his mind and his soul were not supernaturally created but are all products of evolution." Sagan, Lamont, Sellars, Kurtz—all Secular Humanists are in agreement on this.

D. Atheism leads most Secular Humanists to adopt *ethical relativism* - the belief that no absolute moral code exists, and therefore man must adjust his ethical standards in each situation according to his own judgment. If God does not exist, then He cannot establish an absolute moral code. Humanist Max Hocutt says that human beings "may, and do, make up their own rules... Morality is not discovered; it is made."

E. Humanists have a bible – *Humanist Manifesto I* of 1933 and *Humanist Manifesto II* of 1973; these documents have a number of sections, but they may be summarized by a few basic areas insofar as they relate to Christians.

1. A world without God.

- a) According to secular humanists man does not need saving, but if he did he would have to save himself since there is no God to do it.
- b) The world envisioned by humanists is one where we live without God, without Christ, without the Lord's church, without the gospel, without Christian homes, without people who live according to the golden Rule, and without hope of a heaven hereafter.

- c) They have outlawed God and will not be satisfied until He is erased from every human mind.
  - d) Secular humanists' pursue increasing and continuing efforts, especially in our public schools, to eliminate any vestige of the God of the Bible (others are okay such as Allah, Buddha, etc. since they do not make the demands of the God of the Bible).
2. A world of evolved animals.
- a) Man has evolved; time and chance are the avenues by which he has traveled to his present complex state.
  - b) In no sense of the term has man been created by an all-wise and all-powerful Creator who knew what he was doing.
  - c) Secular humanism in its naturalism has life from rocks, dirt, gasses, water, etc., and dares call itself scientific; silly and senseless fit better.
  - d) Secular humanism leaves man with no Creator and no real purpose for being here
3. A world where everything is permitted.
- a) Secular humanists leave ethics up to each person; thus morality is completely situational and relative.
  - b) It opens the door to, if it does not encourage, pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, group sex, and homosexuality between consenting partners.
4. A world of self-centered humans.
- a) Selfishness and pride are encouraged through each person's looking out for number one.
  - b) The right to euthanasia and suicide belong to every person.
  - c) Secular humanists either do not recognize or do not care that unbridled freedom for everyone means the removal of all restraints upon behavior.
  - d) How like ancient Israel when each one did that which was right in his own eyes. Deut. 12:1-10; Judges 17:6; 21:25; Prov. 12:15; 21:2.
5. A world with one government.

a) Secular humanism frowns upon “the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds. We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty and to move toward the building up of a world community in which all sectors of the human family participate. . . . We thus reaffirm a commitment to the building of a world community, at the same time recognizing that this commits us to some hard choices.”

b) The secular humanist is no friend to patriotism that is rapidly fading in our country.

c) The world they seek is socialistic in nature and atheistic in concept.

F. This is a world I do not want; it is a world that God condemns and will not bless; God and righteous people really hold the key in the growing battle between the forces of truth and the forces of godless secular humanism.

#### IV. What has been secular humanism’s effect on society?

A. There is an intuitive sense of foreboding that the fabric of our society is in danger of unraveling.

1. In 1993 the Heritage Foundation released a study of life in the United States produced by William J. Bennett.

2. Among other things he found that since 1960:

a) Violent crime has increased 560 percent.

b) Single parent households have increased 300 percent.

c) Births to unmarried women have increased 400 percent.

d) Teenage suicide has increased 200 percent.

3. These are signs of a society disintegrating in fundamental ways.

B. Despite the strong economic cords binding us together, despite the growing pervasiveness of government in society, despite the extensive legal protections we enjoy, our society is more fragile than ever.

1. It is endangered *institutionally*.

a) Law, commerce, government, and education have greatly expanded their reach, but, at the same time, their public credibility has plummeted.

b) They are all in danger of losing their cultural legitimacy in America.

2. It is endangered *culturally*.

a) There are fewer and fewer shared meanings and desires.

b) The collective sense of what it means to be an American is shattering under the impact of relentless emphasis on distinctions of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

3. It is endangered *morally*.

a) Binding and absolute norms now seem implausible to many people.

b) How then will we contain our life in channels that are beneficial and not harmful?

c) We have good reason to fear those who are toying with the secrets of life and death as they stumble in modern darkness.

d) We rightly fear them because our world champions brilliance without wisdom and power without conscience.

V. How fares the “Christian” church in the battle?

A. The church has been invaded by materialism.

1. We have determined that a thing is of little worth unless we can wear it on our back, eat it off the table, drive it down the street, or jingle it in our pocket.

2. We spend money we don't have buying things we don't need to keep up with people we don't like.

3. This leaves little room for “treasures in heaven.”

B. The church has changed its teaching in some instances.

1. Secular theologians have come to the conclusion that the traditional orthodox understanding of scripture is no longer helpful; they have sought to reshape the gospel to fit the sinner instead of changing the sinner according to the gospel.

2. The major problem with secular theology is its defective view of God.
  - a) It has sought to eliminate the sovereignty of God by eliminating his transcendence. Psa. 113:5-6; Isa. 55:8-9; John 8:23.
  - b) Secularists cannot condone a transcendent God because it puts something or someone above humanity.
  - c) Secularists yank God off of His throne with New Age pantheistic concepts; God is not *the* creator of all that exists; He is a “co-creator” along with humankind.
  - d) He is not a person, he is a projection from human experience.
3. Secular theology’s view of Christ is equally flawed.
  - a) His virgin birth is rejected as myth.
  - b) His claims to be deity (see Mark 2:8-10; John 1:1ff; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-10) are ignored and it is asserted that Jesus never claimed to be God.
  - c) The supernatural work of God in the scripture is seen as mythological.; all of it, including heaven and hell, was relevant to Biblical time, but it needs reinterpretation to make it relevant to the modern secular scene.

#### VI. How fares the church of the Lord in today’s secular society?

- A. First, recognize that secular humanists don’t mind Christians believing what they wish to believe as long as they keep it to themselves and out of the public square.
- B. Many Christians have adopted the fact/value, public/private dichotomy, restricting their faith to the religious sphere while adopting whatever views are current in their professional or social circles.
- C. In effect, there is no longer a Christian mindset in understanding and defining reality.
  1. Many Christians are highly educated in terms of knowledge and technical proficiency, yet they either do not have (or if they have they do not apply) a biblical worldview in interpreting the subject matter of their field.

2. We speak of the “modern mind” and the “scientific mind,” using those terms to describe a collectively accepted set of notions and attitudes.
3. But there is no “Christian mind” – no shared biblically based set of assumptions on subjects like law, education, economics, politics, science, or the arts.
4. As a spiritual being, the Christian prays and attends worship services; as a moral person the Christian follows biblical ethics; but as a thinking person, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularism accepting a frame of reference constructed by the secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations.
5. That is, when we enter the stream of discourse in our field or profession, we participate mentally as non-Christians, using the current concepts and categories, no matter what our private beliefs may be.

D. Thinking “Christianly” means understanding that Christianity gives the truth about the whole of reality, a perspective for interpreting every subject matter.

1. Thus the underlying structure of the entire universe reflects the mind of the Creator.
2. There is no fact/value dichotomy in the scriptural account.
3. Nothing has an autonomous or independent identity, separate from the will of the Creator.
4. As a result, all creation must be interpreted in light of its relationship to God.
5. In any subject area we study, we are discovering the laws of creation ordinances by which God structured the world.
6. As Scripture teaches, the universe speaks of God – “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa. 19:1) – because His character is reflected in the things He has made.

E. Christianity serves two functions – it is a message of personal salvation telling us how to be reconciled to the God from whom our sin has separated us, and it is a lens for interpreting the world.

1. Historically, we have done far better at the first, saving souls, than we have at the second.
2. We have not been nearly as good at helping people to interpret the world around them – at providing a set of interrelated concepts that

function as a lens to give a biblical view of areas like science, politics, economics, or bioethics.

3. We have accepted personal piety and individual salvation, while leaving men to their own devices to interpret the world around them.

F. Many no longer think it is even the function of the church to provide an interpretation of the world, resulting in a church that has been boxed into the private sphere and has largely stopped speaking to the public square.

1. This is one of the most momentous changes that has ever taken place in the church.

2. It has led to lives that are often fractured and fragmented, with our faith firmly locked into the private realm of the church and family, but which rarely has a chance to inform and direct our life and work in the public realm.

3. The aura of worship dissipates after Sunday, and we unconsciously absorb secular attitudes the rest of the week.

4. We inhabit two separate worlds, navigating a sharp divide between our religious life and ordinary life.

G. It is no wonder that people say religion is irrelevant when the result of this “great gulf” is that Christianity has nothing to say to with 9/10<sup>ths</sup> of our life.

1. In this secular/sacred dichotomy, regular work is sometimes denigrated with more importance and value being placed on “church work.” (Do “I’m just a secretary” and “I’m a church secretary” sound differently and, if so, is that difference justified by the tasks?)

2. We hear a great deal about salt and light, but nobody seems to tell us how it really works beyond “do your best and don’t commit any obvious sins.”

3. We may not even believe it works.

a) At work or school are persons not defined as a “Christian” strictly in terms of setting a good example (pays taxes, doesn’t beat wife or children, works hard, etc.), personal behavior (we don’t smoke and we don’t chew, and we don’t go with those who do), and showing concern for others (taking food, attending funerals and weddings).

b) Almost no one defines it as conveying a biblical world view on the areas in which they work, whether literature, science, social studies, the arts, etc.

- c) They want to be Christians in their work, but they don't think in terms of having a biblical framework on the work itself.
  - d) Clearly more than prayer has departed from the public schools and perhaps Christian schools if all they do is inject prayers and Bible reading and teach little or nothing different from secular schools when it comes to class time.
4. Our teaching sometimes contributes to this dichotomy.
- a) We spend a great deal of time teaching the plan of salvation, and it must be taught, but we spend little time teaching how we are to live once we are saved.
  - b) Certainly our physical birth is important because it is the beginning of it all and there would be no life without it, but if we learned no more there would be no life worth living.
  - c) Whether physical or spiritual life, once we have been born our task is to grow and mature.
5. Each of us has a role to play in cultivating the creation and working out God's norms for a just and humane society.
- a) By sheer necessity, of course, a large percentage of our time is devoted to running businesses, teaching schools, publishing newspapers, playing in orchestras, and everything else needed to keep a civilization thriving.
  - b) Even those who work in "full-time Christian service" still need mow the lawn, wash the car, etc.
  - c) It is imperative for us to understand that in carrying out these tasks, we are not doing inferior or second-tier work for the Kingdom; instead, we are agents of God's common grace, doing His work in the world.

VII. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

A. If we find ourselves thinking that we can do the Lord's work in the world's way, as though worldly weapons were adequate, then we have drastically underestimated the nature of the battle.

- 1. The real battle is not in the seen world only, but chiefly in the unseen world. 2 Cor. 4:17-18; Eph. 6:12.
- 2. If we try to battle in the flesh we will be shadowboxing.

3. Sheer activism may bring about results that look impressive to those sitting in the naturalist's chair, whose only frame of reference is the visible world – but they will not be the results the Lord wants.

4. We can go so far as to say that if Christians win their battles by worldly methods, then they have really lost.

a) Visible results can be deceptive.

b) In the seen world, we may appear to make a great advance – win professional recognition, attract people to our cause, raise money for our program, distribute tons of literature.

c) But if it was done by humanistic reliance on technical methods, without the guidance of the Spirit through the Word and using those methods and teaching those things which that Word dictates, then we have accomplished little of value in the eternal unseen world – there is little to no treasure in heaven.

B. The opposite is likewise true: If Christians use the weapons God has ordained – and if we lay our talents at his feet, dying to our pride and ambitions, obeying biblical moral principles, guided by a Christian worldview perspective – then even if by external standards we seem to have lost, we have really won.

1. Outsiders looking on may conclude that we have failed.

2. Even Christian friends and leaders may shake their heads disapprovingly and advise us that we've made a mistake.

3. But if we have genuinely given our lives over to God's purposes and are being led by Him, then we have won a battle in the unseen world.

C. Christian life really begins when we understand that “apart from me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5.