

Adult Sunday School Class: A Christian Philosophy of Learning

Application to Current Events

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(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class.

The form is based on the style used by [Winston Churchill](#) for his speech notes.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright by The Lockman Foundation.)

[Title slide up at the beginning]

Today is our 11th,
and last,
meeting.

It is the 5th class
in which we're trying to make applications
of a Christian philosophy of learning
to particular areas of study.

Our area for today is current events.

I suspect that the direction
in which I'll take today's class
is not quite the direction
many of you are expecting;
but I pray that you'll find it useful nonetheless.

Before we start that discussion,
however,
let's review quickly what we've discussed
in the previous 10 weeks.

[Next slide]

Recall that our goal is
to articulate a Christian philosophy of learning,
which we defined as
a biblically-sound
comprehensive way of thinking about
acquiring and applying truth.

Although we're not going to quite make
the comprehensive part of this,
we have been discussing various
elements that make up
this way of thinking.

I've called these elements
valuable verities,
and we've seen 14 of them so far,
which I've listed on the following 4 slides:

[Next slide]

First, **A wise person**
will continually seek
to acquire and apply truth
for the glory of God.
An unwise person will not.

Second, **Truth**
consists of all the propositions
that God affirms.

Third, **A truth is still a truth,**
even if you do not believe it is true,
or if you do not know whether it is true,
or if God has not chosen to reveal that it is true.

Fourth,
The starting point
for acquiring and applying truth is regeneration.

Fifth, **No person**
ever reaches a point
where he should stop acquiring and applying truth.

[Next slide]

Sixth, **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,**
and is profitable for doctrine,
for reproof,
for correction,
for instruction in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete,
thoroughly equipped for every good work,
which comes from 2 Timothy 3:16-17

One thing that we didn't discuss
but probably should have
is that the Scripture provides the only rational basis
from which to know
that it is possible to learn truth
from our senses.

Secular philosophers
have been uniformly unsuccessful
in establishing a rational foundation
for empiricism.

We know that it is possible
to learn from observations
because the Scripture tells us that it is.

Verity number 7 is

**God does not need to reason
from known truth to new truth,
because He knows everything all at once.**

Where as, verity number 8 says:

**Humans must reason
from known truth to new truth,
because we do not know everything all at once.**

Verity 9 talks a bit about human reasoning:

**Human reasoning
may be divided into two main types:
deductive reasoning,
which is evaluated as to validity and soundness;
and
inductive reasoning,
which is evaluated as to strength,
burden of proof,
and standards of proof.**

[Next slide]

Verity 10 recognizes that

**Proponents of a particular theory
rarely give accurate descriptions
of opposing theories,
no matter how hard
they try to be accurate.**

Valuable verity 11 says that

**All legitimate apologetic methods
affirm these two propositions:
(1) Unbelief in the Gospel
stems from sin,
not
from intellectual problems
with the message;
(2) Only God,
by his grace,
saves anyone.**

Verity 12, which we introduced when talking about science:

**All legitimate scientific inquiry
operates within the
framework and constraints
established by God's revelation
in Scripture.**

[Next slide]

Our verity concerning the arts was:

**Most truth claims in literature
(and all truth claims in non-verbal arts)
are made through exemplification,
not through explicit stating
of the propositions
that are affirmed.**

And finally,
last week,
as we discussed history,
we noted that

**God is in control of all things,
and He is continually
accomplishing His purposes
in history.**

Also, last week,
I handed out a reading list
of some books that you might want to consider
if you want to study further
the topics we've discussed in the class.

This list is also posted on the web site.

If you didn't get a copy,
and would like one,
I have some extras up here;
come get them after class this morning.

Are there any questions or comments,
before we move on to talk about
applying a biblical way of thinking to current events?

Let's begin that discussion,
on a philosophical note.

[Next slide]

In a strict sense,
it is impossible to talk about current events,
because
before we can make a single utterance,
the event about which we are speaking
is a part of the past,
not the present —
that is,
it isn't current any more.

So,
all we can really talk about
is history.

Of course,

[Next slide]

In a practical sense,
we usually consider
the *recent past*
as part of the present;
so talking about current events
does make sense.

When we use the phrase
'Current events'
we don't really mean
what is happening right now;
we mean
what's been happening lately.

Now,
this division between
current events
and history
is not a sharp one.

Different people make the division at different points,
and actually this division isn't even necessarily
strictly chronological for most people,
which I suspect the following slide will reveal.

[Next slide]

Here's a list of various things.

As I read each one,
raise your hand if you think it is a current event.

Today's Sunday School class

Class 4: *The Starting Point for Truth (part 2)*

The war against terrorists

The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon

Jimmy Carter's visit to Cuba

Jimmy Carter's Presidency

The Presidency of George W. Bush

The 2000 election

If it is so hard for us to agree
on whether something is a current event or not,
what can we say about

how a Christian philosophy of learning
applies to learning about current events?

Well, one thing we can certainly say is this:
because the division between current events and history
is not a sharp one,

[Next slide]

everything that we discussed about history
also applies to current events.

In particular,
the valuable verity about God's control
and purposes applies,
but I think it is worth emphasizing this again,
along with another aspect,
which we didn't discuss in relation to history.

Let's put this in the form of
our 15th valuable verity.

[Next slide]

**God is accomplishing
His purposes today,
but He rarely reveals clearly
exactly how He is doing it,
or exactly why
He does what He does.**

As we talked about last week
the Scripture leaves no doubt
that God is in control of all things.

He was in control in the past;
He is in control now;
and He will be in control forever.

Arthur Pink described this truth quite well
in *The Attributes of God*, when he wrote the following,
the last sentence of which we'll make a quaint quote:

[Next slide]

'The god" of this twentieth century —
I don't think things are different
in the 21st century either —
so let's say it this way:

The god of this century
no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ
than does the dim flickering of a candle
the glory of the midday sun.

The "god" who is now talked about in the average pulpit,
spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School,
mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day,
and preached in most
of the so-called Bible Conferences
is the figment of human imagination,
an invention of maudlin sentimentality.
The heathen outside of the pale of Christianity
form "gods" out of wood and stone,
while the millions of heathen inside Christendom
manufacture a "god" out of their own carnal mind.
In reality,
they are but atheists,
for there is no possible alternative
between an absolutely supreme God,
and no God at all.
A "god" whose will is resisted,
whose designs are frustrated,
whose purpose is checkmated,
possesses no title to Deity,
and so far from being a fit object of worship,
merits nought but contempt. ‘

We know without a doubt
that God is in control today,
and He is accomplishing His purposes,
but, the second part of the verity
is also important:

[Next slide]

**but He rarely reveals clearly
exactly how He is doing it,
or exactly why
He does what He does.**

The Scripture tells us a lot about
God's overall purposes —
bringing His people to Himself,
and punishing the wicked,
for example —
and we can be confident
that He's accomplishing these general purposes always,
but we don't know very much
about *how* He is doing this *right now*
through the events that happen.

Does anyone have any questions
about this general principle?

Let's look at some implications of this principle.

[Next slide]

What do you think are some implications?

There are three particular implications
that I want to mention.

[Next slide]

First,
we should take comfort
in the knowledge that God is in control,
no matter what may be happening in the world.

He will bring about what is best for His children.

He knows what is best far better than we do.

Sometimes when something happens
that I don't like,
I find myself thinking something like,
"Well, if I were God, I wouldn't have done it that way."

Perhaps you do, too.

The proper response to such a thought is
"It's a good thing I'm not God."

A second implication of the verity is that
we ought not speculate too much
about God's purposes for specific current events.

This applies to big current events,
like the events of September 11,
and to specific events in our own lives,
and the lives of those around us.

Perhaps, for some events,
there is a time for some thinking about
what God might be accomplishing,
to see, for example,
whether we might be doing something sinful
that needs to be changed.

But we need to be very careful
that we do not claim to have discovered God's purpose
when He has not clearly revealed it.

Any questions are comments about this?

The third implication,
which comes from this verity
combined with other truths from Scripture is this:

Knowing about current culture
is more important than

knowing about specific current events.

Now, it is certainly the case
that we need to know many current events
in order to know about current culture,
because events often reveal the culture.

But we don't necessarily
need to know everything that we can
about everything that is going on in the world,
so long as we know enough
to have a good understanding about
the prevailing beliefs and attitudes in our culture,
both the culture at large,
and just as importantly,
the culture of the visible church, too.

For example,
there's no great harm
in not knowing much
about the latest developments
in the Chandra Levy case.

There is great harm
in not knowing much
about the prevailing attitudes in the country
about marital infidelity,
or self-defense,
or education,
or a host of other matters.

We need to understand
current culture,
so that we can proclaim God's truth faithfully
by recognizing
and denying
the prevailing errors of our day.

The reason we should try to learn about the present
is not
to try to figure out
why God's doing what He's doing right now —
we'll never succeed in doing that —
rather it is
to more faithfully understand and proclaim
God's truth.

As class was ending last week,
I read you excerpts from C. S. Lewis
about the importance of reading old books.

Listen to some additional excerpts from the same passage:

“Every age has its own outlook.

It is specially good at seeing certain truths
and specially liable to make certain mistakes. ...

Nothing strikes me more
when I read the controversies of past ages
than the fact that
both sides
were usually assuming without question
a good deal which we would
now absolutely deny.
They thought that they were as completely opposed
as two sides could be,
but in fact they were all the time secretly united---
united with each other
and against earlier and later ages---
by a great mass of common assumptions.”

Back in the 6th class
when we were talking about reasoning,
I showed you this slide,
without the big red arrow,

[Next slide]

which shows the basic framework
for any attempt to demonstrate that some
conclusion is true.

We talked about the critical importance
of the top part of this framework,
the affirmed, but unstated propositions.

To put Lewis' comments into this framework,
we can say that people from each age
tend to share a lot of the same
affirmed, but unstated propositions.

They may disagree on conclusions,
and on their stated premises,
but there tends to be much in common
with the unstated premises.

This is no less true for us today
than it was for our ancestors.

To a large extent,
these unstated premises
can be thought of as basically
defining the prevailing cultural beliefs and attitudes.

Let's take some time now
to try to state
some of the generally accepted
but often unstated premises

that underlay our culture today.

For simplicity,
let's concentrate on the United States only,
and let's start with the general culture,
not the culture of the visible church specifically.

[Next slide]

What do you believe are
some of the generally shared premises
within the United States today?

That is,
what are some propositions
that most Americans affirm — believe are true —
today?

One example would be, I think,
“The United States has the strongest military
in the world.”

What are some others?

[Allow a good amount of discussion before moving on.]

There are quite a few things that we could discuss,
but I've chosen 3 that I want to highlight this morning.

These 3 are not necessarily
the most dangerous prevailing premises,
but they are certainly among the most dangerous.

[Next slide]

The first one is this:
Discrimination is bad,
in nearly every form,
and in nearly every situation.

Everyone is entitled to the same privileges.

If Jim can go to college
with his 1600 SAT score,
well Joe deserves to go too
with his 800 SAT score.

If you can vote,
I should be able to vote, too,
even if I can't read or write,
or even if I don't know the name of the candidates.

Not only does everyone deserve the same privileges,
but everyone's opinion is equally valid.

Well, almost everyone's,
there is one of awful people
who don't have valid opinions;
it's those awful people with the audacity
to claim that everyone's opinion
isn't
equally valid.

Not everyone expresses
this prevailing attitude
quite as explicitly as I just have —
although more and more often many people are —
but the attitude dominates our culture.

It dominates our culture,
partially because it has been
slowly making inroads into our culture
for a long time.

Listen to this,
which was written by R. L. Dabney (Discussions, Volume III)
about 150 years ago:

... French atheism
gave the world the Jacobin theory of political rights.
The Bible had been teaching mankind
for three thousand years
the great doctrine of men's moral equality
before the Father,
the great basis of all free,
just,
and truly republican forms of civil society.

Atheism now travestied this true doctrine
by her mortal heresy
of the absolute equality of men,
asserting that every human being
is naturally and inalienably
entitled to every right,
power,
and prerogative in civil society
which is allowed to any man or any class.

The Bible taught a liberty which consists
in each man's unhindered privilege
of having and doing just those things,
and no others,
to which he is rationally
and morally entitled.

Jacobinism taught the liberty of license---
every man's natural right
to indulge his own absolute will;
and it set up this fiendish caricature
as the object of sacred worship for mankind.

Now, democratic Protestantism in these United States
has become so ignorant,

so superficial and wilful,
that it confounds the true republicanism
with this deadly heresy of Jacobinism.
It has ceased to know a difference.
Hence, when the atheistic doctrine
begins to bear its natural fruits of
license,
insubordination,
communism,
and anarchy,
[our] democratic Protestantism
does not know how to rebuke them.

It has recognized the parents;
how can it consistently condemn the children?

As Dabney asserted about the visible church
in his day,
the visible church in our day
is also infested by this same attitude.

Now, some will say,
“But it isn’t so bad in the church.
We certainly don’t claim that
all opinions are equal —
atheism isn’t equal to Christianity, for example.”

And that is true,
it isn’t as bad today
within the conservative churches
(at least for explicitly theological and moral matters) —
but it is as bad within the
so-called mainline churches —
and many conservative churches
are heading down the same path
these other churches went down 100 years ago.

We’re on the same path,
we’ve just not made it so far down the road quite yet;
We’re a bit slow, it seems.

Perhaps if enough of us recognize we’re on that path,
God will yet grant us the grace
to be able to get off it,
before it is too late.

[Next slide]

The second prevailing premise that I want to mention
is this:
Appearance is more important than substance.

This is perhaps most obvious
in the ridiculous way in which our society

puts up as role models
actors, actresses, singers,
and other entertainer
whose only credentials are how they look.

It also shows up in politics and other areas.

Think about the most well-known people in the world,
and why they are well known,
and I think you'll see how
wide-spread this attitude is today.

This attitude is also common within the church today.

How does it show up in churches?

Entertainment centered "worship" services
with content free "messages" from pastors
is perhaps the most obvious.

Putting this overemphasis on appearance
together with the egalitarianism we talked about earlier
yields some interesting results today, too,
especially in educational institutions,
both secular and Christian.

One particular example
comes quickly to mind.

However,
as an illustration of the ubiquity
of the third attitude that's coming up,
I won't give this example,
because some of you would be offended by it;
if you think about it clearly,
you should be able to come up with it yourself.

[Next slide]

The third attitude that is very common in our society today is that
Feelings are more important than thoughts.

This attitude
shows up in common language
in phrases like
"What do you *feel* about campaign finance reform?"

Personally,
it leaves me feeling a little cold,
but I'd rather be asked what I think about it.

This attitude also reveals itself
in some many people having
a much greater concern

about not hurting someone's feelings
than
about not letting someone think falsehoods.

I'm just about out of time
so I'm not going to say anything more about this,
except to remark
that this attitude is a part of the culture
of the visible church today, too ...

... just like the other two.

Let me emphasize this by making two small changes
to the slide to yield this next slide.

[Next slide]

I also changed the "feelings" example,
but that wasn't really necessary.

There are differences
between the church and the world
on these matters,
but the differences are ones of degree,
not of kind.

As I said earlier,
the church is following the world;
we're just traveling a bit more slowly.

There's a an old joke that
the only difference between the Democrats
and the Republicans is 10 years.

Well, something similar is
happening with the church in the U.S., too.

As I said at the beginning,
our class this morning probably went in a different direction
than you anticipated it would;
that was intentional,
because I wanted to cover the things
that I think are most important about
our current world.

Let me wrap up with three quick suggestions
related to learning about current events and attitudes.

[Next slide]

The first two are related to today's subject.

First, recognize that
we are deeply affected

by the prevailing attitudes of our time.

Recognize, too, that
this effect can be lessened
some by studying “the old books”;
and that
the effect of prevailing attitudes
can be lessened the most by studying the Book.

Second, in studying the Book,
strive to evaluate these attitudes
according to the Scripture,
and not the other way around.

My final closing suggestion comes
by way of the Jonathan Edwards sermon
from which I read to you in the first class:

Seek the truth
with the same diligence and labor
with which men
are wont
to dig in mines of silver and gold.

[Next slide]

Next week there will be new classes.

I will remind you that Quote ID challenge #2
will continue until someone gives the right answer.

The number of wrong answers
is now up to 9:
Teddy Roosevelt,
Woody Allen,
David Holloway,
Gordon Clark,
C. S. Lewis,
Yogi Berra,
J.R.R. Tolkien
R. C. Sproul,
and
Gene Veith.

(Right after class, a 10th wrong guess was offered:
Doug Wilson.)

As you look at this list of wrong answers,
you’ll see that some folks
seem to have forgotten one of the hints:
The person is still alive today,
as several of the people
who have been suggested
are generally thought to be dead.

I have enjoyed very much teaching this class,
and hope you all have learned something from it.

Thank you.