

## Understanding the Ideas that Shape Our World • Part 5

### I. INTRODUCTION

**Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

**Colossians 3:2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.**

#### A. The Last

1. This is the last study in our initial series in **Building a Christian Worldview**.
2. This series has been dedicated to **Understanding the Ideas that Shape our World**.
3. In this 5<sup>th</sup> & final study we'll be looking at the last two philosophies of existentialism & hedonism.

#### B. So Far

1. Before we dive into them, let's briefly review where we've been so far.
2. In our 1<sup>st</sup> study we examined the whole idea of *worldview* -
  - a. What a worldview is & how it's constructed.
  - b. We saw what role it plays in daily life.
3. In our 2<sup>nd</sup> study we *began* a look at the *various philosophies* that have been spun off by the major worldviews. We examined the overarching philosophies of *secularism & humanism*.
4. In our 3<sup>rd</sup> study we looked at *pragmatism*.
5. Last time, in our 4<sup>th</sup> study we looked at *relativism*,
6. And tonight we take the whole secularistic "train of thought" to its logical & inevitable conclusion – *existentialism & hedonism*.

#### C. Disclaimer

1. Before we go any further though, I need to make this *disclaimer* –
2. As we examine these worldviews & philosophies, I hope everyone understands that in order to cover them in the time allotted us here on Saturday nights, I'm forced to *simplify* them dramatically.
3. As full-bodied philosophies, they touch on a far more wide-ranging field of subjects than what we're able to cover here.
4. What I'm doing is *distilling* them down to their *most basic premise*, showing how they *influence* modern life, then briefly *analyzing* them from a *Christian* worldview.
5. The danger we face when dealing with these philosophies *this way* is that in our attempt to *simplify*, we can become *simplistic*.
6. When we stray over into being *simplistic*, we can easily *misrepresent* the thing we're trying to explain.
7. I've tried not to do that with my treatment of any of the worldviews & philosophies we've covered, but I do want you to know that I'm aware of the danger.
8. The danger of being simplistic is *especially true* with our 1<sup>st</sup> philosophy for

review tonight – Existentialism.

## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### A. “Man Is A Useless Passion”

1. “Man is a useless passion.” So wrote French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre.
2. And that pretty much sums up secular existentialism.
3. As per its name, *existentialism* is a philosophy about human *existence*.
4. While other philosophies are concerned with the *mind & thinking*, existentialism is *more* concerned with the *will & feelings*.
5. Existentialism sees man as a *creature of passion*, that it is his *emotions* that make him *unique*.
  - a. He laughs. He cries. He sings. He sorrows.
  - b. He blesses. He curses. He rages & rejoices.
  - c. He loves. He hates. He yearns & loathes.
6. Existentialism says that man *cannot* be understood simply by his *intellectual* activity.
7. Above all, it is his *passion*, his *feeling* the life he’s living, that makes him a man.

### B. The Root of Existentialism

1. Existentialism came out of a desire to break away from the *generalities* drawn by previous philosophy.
2. With the Enlightenment’s rejection of the Christian worldview & the *Biblical* definition of man, *secularism* tried to develop its *own* theory of humanity.
3. All along the way, there was the drive to discover the *essence* of what makes man, man. What is the essence of *mankind*?
  - a. Actually, philosophy’s goal of defining what it means to be *human* goes back to the its beginning among the Greeks.
  - b. Plato wrestled with the issue & sought for a definition of man that would set him apart for other creatures.
  - c. He finally settled on the definition that man is a “featherless biped.”
  - d. This definition worked fine until one of his students played a joke on him & tossed a plucked chicken over the wall into the courtyard where Plato was teaching a class.
  - e. Around the chicken’s neck was a sign that read, “Plato’s man.”
4. As secularism flowered into the weeds of humanism, pragmatism, & relativism, each with their own theory of the *essence of humanity*, some thinkers began to *rebel* against the attempt to *reduce* what man *is* to some kind of *theory of essence*.
5. They rejected the idea of “man–mankind–humanity” & said there *is* no *man*, *only men & women*.
6. They maintained that being a human is something one *experiences*, not defines!
7. Their mantra was “existence *precedes* essence;”
  - a. By which they meant that any attempt to define humanity was a waste of time.
  - b. In seeking to come up with a *theory* of humanity, existentialists said

- philosophy was actually *degrading* man.
8. Since the existentialist's central point of interest is man's *feelings* rather than mind, they've come to make *the whole point of living* to realize one's sense of self by making choices that *produce emotions*.
  9. In other words – one experiences his/her existence *through* the experience of emotions.
  10. *What* emotion you feel isn't as important as *that* you feel.
  11. For if you're feeling, then you must exist.
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12. It's not hard to see that existentialism is pretty much the *end-of-the-line* for secularism.
    - a. Secularism began as an attempt to redefine humanity along purely worldly & man-centered terms.
    - b. Early on, secularism held out hope for the *perfectibility* of the human race.
    - c. But as the decades passed, the various flavors & branches of secularism shed more & more of their *romantic attachment* to the past when life was seen as the *gift* of God.
    - d. They became increasingly *pessimistic & fatalistic*.
    - e. Existentialists were the first to cut-to-the-chase & admit that ultimately,  
*Life is meaningless.*
  13. That's what Jean-Paul Sartre & Albert Camus, two of the most influential of existentialist philosophers, tried to get across in their writing.
  14. They said that in the end, there are only 2 options for men & women:
    - 1) Live *in* the moment, *for* the moment, making choices that will maximize your experience of emotion, & so know you're alive.
    - 2) Or, take the *best road* of all & commit *suicide*.
  15. Since life has *no meaning*, no purpose, why live?
  16. That's why Sartre called man "a *useless* passion."
  17. Both Sartre & Camus were heavily influenced by a German philosopher named Friedrich Nietzsche.
    - a. Nietzsche simply took secularism *to its logical conclusion*.
    - b. He understood that if this time is the *only* time & this world the *only* reality, then *there is no God*.
    - c. And if there is no God, then in the final analysis, life is meaningless.
    - d. Values, truth, & ethics are all a matter of purely personal decision.
    - e. Right & wrong are simply what each person has the *courage* to decide for him/herself.
  18. It was Nietzsche who declared the "Death of God."
    - a. What he meant is that it had come time for *the people of the modern world* to realize that the secularism *they were living meant* they had to follow through & shed their romantic attachment to the past's belief in God.
    - b. Men & women needed to embrace the fact that there is no God & get on with their lives.
    - c. But then, for Nietzsche, that life meant making choices that asserted one's independence from any & all forms of external authority.
    - d. He said that anyone who follows a lifestyle of doing what society says, or

- what those in authority demand, is not being a *genuine* human being.
- e. For Nietzsche, an *authentic* man or woman makes his or her own rules & lives by their *own morality*.
19. All of Ernest Hemingway's heroes are examples of Nietzsche's authentic men & women.
    - a. The old man who challenges the sea.
    - b. The soldier who ignores the tolling bell.
    - c. The matador who grabs the bull by the horns.
    - d. The man who takes on Mt. Kilimanjaro.
  20. How did Hemingway die? He committed suicide – blew his brains out with a shotgun. He was simply following through with what existentialism held as the best choice when you finally accept that life is meaningless.

### **C. Evidences of Existentialism**

1. I suspect many of you have already thought of a number of examples of how existentialism manifests itself today.
2. In previous times, when you wanted to know a person's views on a particular topic, you asked, "What do you *think* about that?"
3. But today, the question is almost always asked this way, "What do you *feel* about that?"
  - a. The accent has changed from *thinking to feeling*.
  - b. Feelings have become the new standard for truth.
4. Feelings define our ethics. The slogan, "*If it feels good – do it*" while not as popular as it used to be, still governs the choices of many.
5. Many of the celebrities honored by popular media are people who defy convention because they are following Nietzsche's existentialist mandate to defy the "herd mentality."
  - a. Whether it's the color & cut of their hair,
  - b. The style of their clothes,
  - c. The number of tats & body piercings
  - d. Or their public comments –
  - e. It's all aimed at one thing – *creating shock – provoking a reaction* –
  - f. Because after all, that's all there is – the experience of existence by feeling an emotion.
6. Many sociologists believe the popularity of tattoos & piercings is simply a manifestation of existentialism.
  - a. the pain associated with getting them reminds the person *they're alive*.
  - b. then *wearing* them is a *reminder* of the pain as well as a way to evoke a reaction from those who disapprove of them.
7. Already, because tats & piercings aren't as avant garde as they were just a few years ago, their popularity is beginning to decline.
8. Since they've lost a good part of their *shock value*, fewer people want them for that reason.
9. In fact now, in many circles, a tattoo or a piercing has become *the norm*, a *necessary* fashion accessory – like a belt.
10. As is true for all such cultural trends – tats & piercings *will pass*.

11. The only question is – **what form** will pessimistic existentialism take next?
12. We may already be seeing the answer to that in a highly disturbing trend taking place on high school campuses across the country.
  - a. Many youth social workers & educators are expressing their concern over the increase in **bisexuality** among high school girls. <sup>[1]</sup>
  - b. Called being “heteroflexible,” it’s a growing trend toward casting aside traditional sexual mores in favor of a no-restraint acceptance of open sexuality.
  - c. It’s as if young people are actively looking for ways to follow Nietzsche’s instructions to **defy convention**, to rebel against social norms & do things that are aimed at getting a **strong reaction** from others.
13. The whole purpose of modern art is to do what? **Evoke an emotional reaction.**
  - a. Classical art was an attempt either **recreate** something, or to capture the essence of the thing represented.
  - b. Beauty, accuracy, proportion were the hallmarks of classical art.
  - c. Modernist art dispenses with all of these & aims at one thing – a **gut-reaction** from the viewer. It’s existentialist.
  - d. Art critics no longer are concerned with beauty – only – is it “**evocative?**”

#### **D. Our Response**

1. As Christians, our response to existentialism is the same as that which we give for secularism, because existentialism is really just the logical end of secularism.
2. This world & this moment **are not** all there is.
3. God is not dead – He is very much alive & real.
4. Man is not a useless passion – He’s an eternal being made in God’s image with a divine purpose & destiny.
5. We can **agree** with existentialism that **choices are** important – but not simply because they result in emotions that make us feel alive.
6. **The power to chose** is the gift of God & central to what makes man unique.
7. **How** we chose is all important because our choices fall under an unchanging standard of morality & **result in eternal consequences.**

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8. One of the most common ways in which I see existentialism infecting the Church is in counseling.
  - a. It seems one of the most oft repeated pieces of instruction I give is to **not** make choices based on **emotions** but on what’s **right**.
  - b. Many of the discipleship programs new believers go through today include a lesson on **not living** out of their emotions but out of obedience to God.
  - c. This has become a standard lesson because existentialism has become so common as a way of thinking & living.
9. Up to about a hundred years ago, people understood that happiness was not something to aim one’s life at as the **primary** goal.
  - a. They understood that happiness was the **result**, the **fruit** of achieving the right goal in life.
  - b. That goal was to live a **significant life**, in whatever way they defined

significance.

- 1) Success in business.
  - 2) Success in family.
  - 3) Success in fame, power, whatever.
10. But existentialism has shifted the emphasis so that today, people seek happiness as a thing unto itself! It's become their goal.
    - a. They make their choices with the primary concern to produce a "feeling of happiness."
    - b. Happiness is no longer something that comes as the result of doing the right thing. It's the thing itself.
  11. When Christianity is presented as merely *a way to maximize one's happiness*, then we've embraced existentialism.
  12. When church is reduced to an *event* that stirs us emotionally & we judge the service on how "moved" we are, then we've become existentialists.
  13. One of my concerns for the Church in America today is that more & more it seems local fellowships are seeking to turn their services into *events* that *touch people emotionally*, but do little to *renew their minds*.

### III. Hedonism

#### A. The "Real" End

1. Earlier I said that existentialism was the logical conclusion of secularism.
2. Actually, there's one more twig on the tree, one last noxious bloom on the bush of secularism that's one step *beyond* existentialism – it's called *hedonism*.
3. As I said before, while most secular philosophies center on the intellect, existentialism centers on the emotions.
4. The last step is to come down all the way & center man's existence in his *physical body*.
5. And really, isn't that the *real end of secularism*?
6. If there's no God, then man is just a material object animated by chemical processes that we give the label "life" to.
  - a. The mind is nothing but the organ of the brain shooting electrical signals between cellular synapses.
  - b. And the soul is a nice story we tell ourselves in order to assign some special place to ourselves in the universe.
7. Hedonism says "phooey" to all this.
  - a. Man is nothing but a body & the body is all that matters.
  - b. So, eat, drink, & be merry, for tomorrow we die.
8. Right & wrong are only descriptions of how to *maximize pleasure & minimize pain*.
9. Hedonism is all about *physical pleasure*.
10. *That* is the greatest good & the single value to live by & for.

#### B. Food, Fashion, Fun

1. For the hedonist, life is all about food, fashion & fun.
2. For most hedonists, the fun is comprised mainly of activities that create a "thrill."

3. This is why **sex** is such a big part of hedonism – because when morality is cast aside, new sexual experiences maximize a person’s experience of “the thrill.”
4. Hugh Hefner is the modern age’s patron saint of Hedonism.
  - a. He openly admits that the entire Playboy enterprise is grounded in the philosophy of hedonism.
  - b. He unlocked the door to a commercially & culturally approved immorality.
  - c. But many others have pushed that door wide open.
  - d. Today there are special resorts called “Hedonism” where vacationers can go to experience just about every form of sexual immorality & sensual indulgence imaginable.

### **C. Our Response**

1. In Matthew 6:25 Jesus said –  
**“I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food & the body more than clothing?”**
2. Jesus was flatly refuting the whole orientation to life that would put the body *before* the soul & spirit.
3. In the Fall, part of the appeal the devil made to Eve was to define herself by the body *without regard to the spirit*. It was a lie that led to disaster.
4. The Christian view of the body is that it’s a *part* of our makeup as men & women.
  - a. It’s the *vehicle* our soul & spirit get around in in the physical universe.
  - b. But it’s to submit to the higher desires of the Spirit.
5. To reduce life to nothing more than the physical pleasure is a formula for disaster because man’s deepest longings are *spiritual* in nature.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

### **A. The Last Men**

1. As we wrap up our look at the ideas that shape our world, we realize we’ve come to the *real end*, the *final result* of the secularist worldview in existentialism & hedonism.
2. In fact, Nietzsche himself *realized* where the existentialism he advocated ultimately led, & went insane.
3. Projecting his ideas into the future, & seeing where society was already heading in his day, he made a *prediction* & spoke of what he called **“The Last Men.”**
4. He said the last men, meaning those at the end of history, will be characterized by 2 things – diet & exercise.
  - a. As the last men, they will be complete secularists for whom God is dead.
  - b. All that is left is to live for the moment, their lives defined by *pure hedonism*.
  - c. So they will eat & drink to satisfy their desire for something tasty.
  - d. But seeing their bodies growing pudgy, they will diet & exercise because they will see the perfect body as the sum of human perfection.
5. Their existence will be an endless cycle of splurging & dieting.

### **B. There We Are**

1. It's a bit spooky reading Nietzsche's description of the Last Men because it paints a picture of our world today – especially Southern CA.
2. We live in an age when the *bush of secularism* spawned in the Enlightenment has bloomed, spread its petals, withered, & finally wilted.
3. And many people, probably *most* in fact, are now asking, "What's next?"
4. There's a new interest in spiritual things, of investigating the spiritual dimension.
5. The New Age Movement has grown in popularity because of this new interest in spiritual things.
6. If there was ever a time in which Christians need to renew their minds & prepare to share the reasons for their faith - it's now.



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