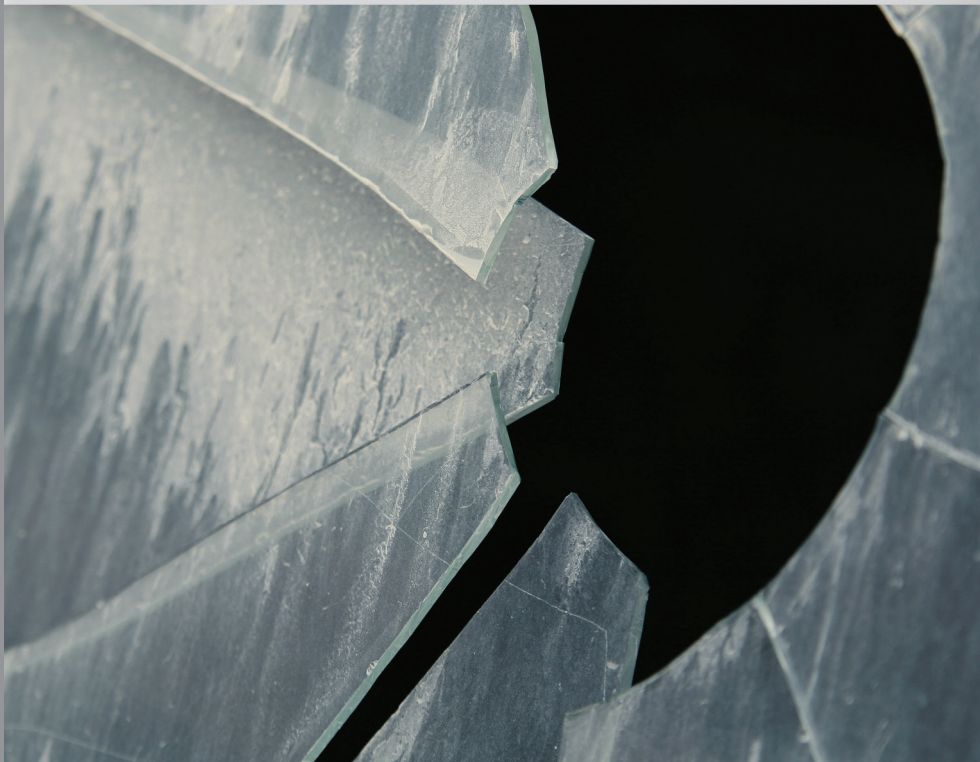


S T U D Y   G U I D E



# When Worlds Collide

by R.C. Sproul



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R.C. Sproul



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# A War of Ideas

## INTRODUCTION

All of the warfare throughout human history began because of a conflict of ideas. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul outlines the basic composition of every worldview to demonstrate how a collision of worldviews can be called a war unto itself.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the three principles operating behind every worldview
2. To underscore the exclusivity of Christianity among competing worldviews

## SCRIPTURE READING

*“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”*

—John 18:37–38

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. War is a direct consequence of conflict that begins in the mind.
  1. Historians primarily focus on the physical provocations of war, but the physical provocations of war can be traced back to a conflict of ideas.
  2. Ideas conflict as a result of the collision of competing worldviews.
    - a. Worldviews are formulated concepts by which people understand the complexities of the world and how they are to relate to the world.
    - b. Worldviews are composed of three fundamental elements: our understanding of God, our understanding of man, and our understanding of the surrounding world.

- B. Our understanding of God is the most significant element constructing our worldview.
1. The events of September 11, 2001, shifted America's focus toward God's role in everyday life but manifested America's tendency toward syncretism.
    - a. The most basic constitutional right in the United States is the free exercise of religion as guaranteed through the First Amendment.
    - b. American syncretism is the belief that since all religions are equally protected under the law, then all religions are equally valid.
    - c. The belief that various religious traditions worship the same God is an unfortunate consequence of American public religion.
  2. A cursory glance at the propositional content of world religions reveals that there are radical differences among different religions.
    - a. Religious beliefs about Jesus alone demonstrate how world religions are fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed to each other.
    - b. As in the case of Christianity and Judaism, Jesus cannot at the same time be the Messiah and a false teacher claiming to be the Messiah.
    - c. The only way we can say Christianity and Judaism are the same is to deny the first affirmation of the Christian faith: Jesus is the Christ.
  3. The Christian concept of God is diametrically opposed to the concept of God found in other religions.
    - a. The Christian concept of God as triune—existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is at the heart of the Christian life and worldview.
    - b. The conception of God in religions such as Islam and Judaism requires such religions to reject the conception of God as triune.
    - c. The undeniable conclusion: Jews, Muslims, and Christians do not worship the same God, despite the claims of American civil religion.
  4. Christianity necessitates an exclusive understanding of God in accord with the exclusive monotheism foundationally presented in the Bible.
    - a. Elijah's confrontation with the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel supports an exclusive understanding of God (1 Kings 18:20–40).
    - b. Israel's greatest weakness in the Old Testament was a theological weakness that allowed for a pagan and syncretistic concept of God.
    - c. Romans 1:18–32 demonstrates how idolatry is the primordial sin that defines each and every subsequent sin throughout human history.
    - d. Idolatry is the distortion of God as revealed in Scripture, so Christians must avoid idolatry by living in accord with His revealed character.
- C. Our understanding of God is the most significant element of our worldview, for if we misunderstand God, we will misunderstand ourselves and the world in which we live.
1. Human beings are created in the image of God, so we must understand God in order to understand what it is to be made in His image.
    - a. The tragic events of 9/11 confronted the distorted notions of moral relativism and the moral implications of macroevolutionary theory.

- b. Outrage in the face of national tragedy would be meaningless if the worldviews of moral relativism and macroevolution were true.
- c. Being made in the image of God, we have the capacity to recognize the moral evil of such events, knowing that human life is sacred.
2. We must understand God in order to understand how God relates to nature.
  - a. The tendency of our day and age is to view nature as functioning independently from the government of God, apart from providence.
  - b. Christianity affirms the absolute providence of God in His sustaining involvement in the world, that nothing can exist apart from His power.
  - c. Without this concept of divine providence, the world can only be seen as operating by internal fixed laws, and science becomes religion.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why are beliefs about God the most important component of a worldview?
  - a. God created the world and, by implication, worldviews.
  - b. Worldviews would not be possible without belief in God.
  - c. God should be foremost in our lives so that He might be glorified.
  - d. Our understanding of God structures how we relate to everything.
2. What is American syncretism?
  - a. The belief that all religions have equal protection under law.
  - b. The belief that all religions should be characteristically patriotic.
  - c. The belief that all religions are equally valid.
  - d. The belief that all religions have a civil duty to foster national unity.
3. What example from the Bible did Dr. Sproul use to demonstrate God's demands for pure and undefiled worship?
  - a. Moses and the plagues in the Egypt
  - b. Aaron and the golden calf at Mount Sinai
  - c. Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel
  - d. Jesus and the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem
4. Military weakness led to the destruction of Israel as a nation.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. Who concluded, within a worldview predicated on God's nonexistence, that man is a "useless passion"?
  - a. Martin Heidegger
  - b. Christopher Hitchens
  - c. Fyodor Dostoevsky
  - d. Jean-Paul Sartre

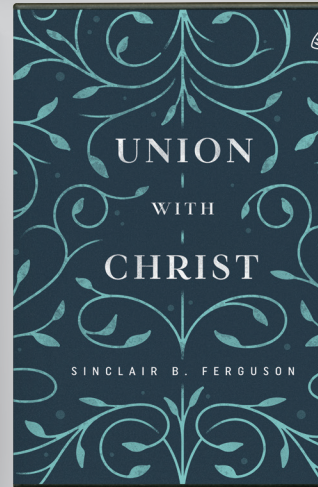
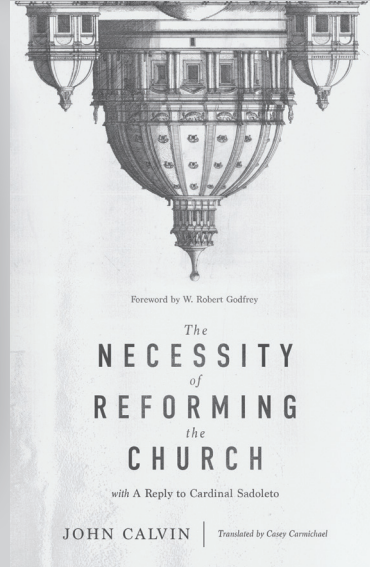
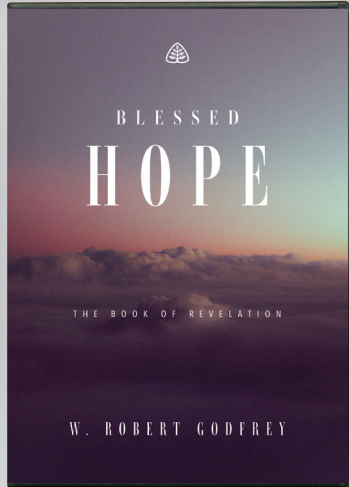
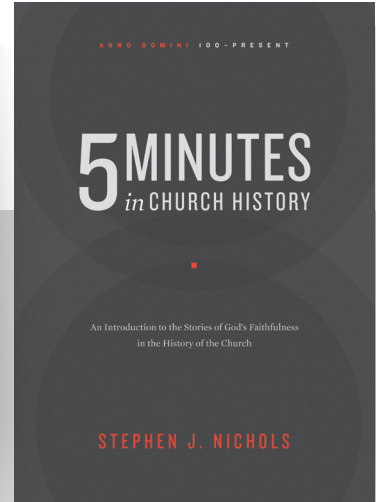
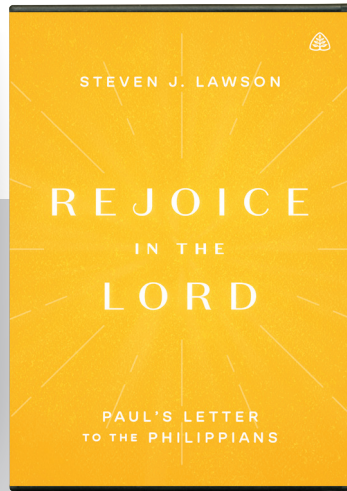
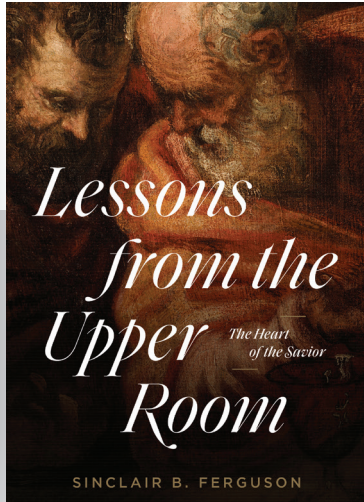
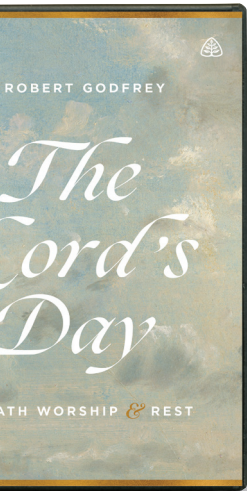
6. What concept is central to God's relationship to the world?
  - a. Foreknowledge
  - b. Omnipotence
  - c. Providence
  - d. Deism

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the Christian worldview. What do you believe is the most fundamental component of the Christian worldview?
2. How do views concerning the identity of Jesus differ among Christianity, Judaism, and Islam? How is this important to Dr. Sproul's argument?
3. How does the idea of God's image reinforce the priority of our knowledge of God as the chief component of a worldview? In this respect, how does the biblical worldview differ from those based on moral relativism or macroevolution?
4. How can a Christian be guilty of idolatry? How does a right understanding of God work out practically in the Christian life?



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