

S T U D Y   G U I D E



# CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM



STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

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# Christianity and Liberalism

Stephen J. Nichols



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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# Introduction

In 1923, J. Gresham Machen wrote his classic work *Christianity and Liberalism*. Machen understood that he lived in a time that needed answers. People needed to know the fundamental doctrinal convictions of Christianity in an age of compromise. Modernism was threatening the church, and liberals within the church were seeking to accommodate it, calling into question bedrock doctrines of the faith. In this teaching series, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols reminds us of who Machen was, why his book is still important, and how it teaches us that there is only one true, uncompromising Christian faith.

This study guide is a companion to the video teaching series. Whether you are using the DVDs, streaming the videos on Ligonier.org, or going through the course in Ligonier Connect, this resource is designed to help you make the most of the learning experience. For each message in the series, there is a corresponding lesson in this guide. Here is what you will find in each lesson:

INTRODUCTION	<p>The introduction is a brief paragraph that summarizes the content covered in the lecture and considered in the study guide lesson.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use the introduction to each lesson to get a sense of the big picture before watching the video. Refer to these statements as you work through the study guide to remind yourself of what you have already covered and where you are headed.</p>
LEARNING GOALS	<p>The learning goals are the knowledge and skills that the study guide lesson will endeavor to equip you with as you work through the lecture content.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Familiarize yourself with the goals of each lesson before engaging its contents. Keeping the overall purpose in mind as you watch each video and reflect on or discuss the questions will help you get the most out of each lesson.</p>
KEY IDEAS	<p>The key ideas are the major points or takeaways from the lecture.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use these ideas to prepare yourself for each lesson and to review previous lessons. They describe specifically the knowledge that each lecture is communicating.</p>

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	<p>The questions are the guided reflection and/or discussion component of the lesson that is intended to help you prepare for, process, and organize what you are learning.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Reflect on individually or discuss in a group the questions in the order in which they appear in the lesson. The time stamps in the right margin indicate where the answers to questions during the video can be found.</p>
PRAYER	<p>The prayer section offers suggestions for how to close the lesson in prayer with respect to what was taught in the lecture.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Consider using each lesson's prayer section as a guide to personal or group prayer. These sections follow the ACTS prayer model, which you can learn more about in R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet <i>Does Prayer Change Things?</i> This helpful guide is available as a free e-book at <a href="http://Ligonier.org">Ligonier.org</a>.</p>
REVIEW QUIZ	<p>The review quiz is a set of six multiple-choice questions that appears at the end of each lesson.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use each quiz to check your comprehension and memory of the major points covered in each lecture. It will be most beneficial to your learning if you take a lesson's quiz either sometime between lessons or just before you begin the next lesson in the study guide.</p>
ANSWER KEY	<p>The answer key provides explanations for the reflection and discussion questions and answers to the multiple-choice questions in the review quiz.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use the answer key to check your own answers or when you do not know the answer. Note: Do not give in too quickly; struggling for a few moments to recall an answer reinforces it in your mind.</p>

# Study Schedules

The following table suggests four plans for working through the *Christianity and Liberalism* video teaching series and this companion study guide. Whether you are going through this series on your own or with a group, these schedules should help you plan your study path.

	Extended 14-Week Plan	Standard 12-Week Plan	Abbreviated 6-Week Plan	Intensive 4-Week Plan
Week	Lesson			
1	*	1	1 & 2	1–3
2	1	2	3 & 4	4–6
3	2	3	5 & 6	7–9
4	3	4	7 & 8	10–12
5	4	5	9 & 10	
6	5	6	11 & 12	
7	6	7		
8	7	8		
9	8	9		
10	9	10		
11	10	11		
12	11	12		
13	12			
14	*			

\* For these weeks, rather than completing lessons, spend your time discussing and praying about your learning goals for the study (the first week) and the most valuable takeaways from the study (the last week).

# The Present Emergency

## INTRODUCTION

“The Present Emergency and How to Meet It” was the title of the first radio recording in a series of talks from J. Gresham Machen to the American public. This message, when heard alongside his inaugural lecture as a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, gives us a sense of Machen’s unwavering convictions. In this lesson, Dr. Nichols explains how, despite change, Machen’s answer to present emergencies was the Bible and its message.

## LEARNING GOALS

When you have finished this lesson, you should be able to:

- Appreciate why undertaking this study on Machen and *Christianity and Liberalism* is relevant in the twenty-first century
- Explain the significance of Machen’s central points in his radio program and inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary
- Summarize the pressing issues in the church and society at the time when Machen delivered these messages

## KEY IDEAS

- The ultimate issue that people face, even amid worldly crisis, concerns their standing before God.
- Machen’s response to crisis gives us perspective on our own crises as well as on their answer by keeping our eyes fixed on what is ultimate.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



## Before the Video

### *What Do You Think?*

Take a moment to answer the following questions. They will prepare you for the lecture.

- What are the pressing present emergencies of today?
- What are your goals in undertaking this study on Machen and *Christianity and Liberalism*?

### *Scripture Reading*

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.*

—Jude 1–2

- What realities in Jude’s greeting before his call for us to contend for the faith assure us that our contending is not in vain?

## During the Video

Answer the following questions while you watch the video. They will guide you through the lecture.

### *The Present Emergency*

0:00–10:23

- What motivated Machen to deliver his series of radio messages?
- What “present emergencies” did Machen call to mind in his first radio broadcast? What is the ultimate emergency?

### *The Inaugural Lecture*

10:23–15:56

- What did Machen assert about the church and modern culture in his inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary?
- How did Machen describe God in this inaugural lecture?



*Ultimate Issues*

15:56–24:19

- What has the church needed to do since its beginning?
- What are some examples from church history that support Allan MacRae's statement about what the church has needed to do since its beginning?

## After the Video

Answer the following questions after you have finished the lecture. They will help you identify and summarize the major points.

- Because Machen opened his broadcast with the various things that were causing people anxiety at that time, what can be concluded about Machen's character? Where does he direct people for answers?

If you are in a group, ask the members the following questions: How can bringing to someone's mind what is truly ultimate help him or her through a tragedy or period of anxiety and worry? How can we do this without being dismissive of someone's experience?

- How was Machen's consistency in conveying the same message demonstrated in this lesson?

If you are in a group, ask the members to share their list of present emergencies that they jotted down before the lecture and ask the following question: Is Machen's consistent message still relevant? How so?

- How might studying Machen's life and his work *Christianity and Liberalism* be helpful?

If you are in a group, survey the members to see who might be interested in reading *Christianity and Liberalism* alongside this study.

## PRAYER

Commit what you have learned from God's Word in this lesson to prayer.

- Praise God for His sovereign power that He displays through His acts of providence.
- Confess any doubts you might have about the ability of Scripture to answer today's problems.

- Thank God for faithful men and women throughout history who have remained steadfast for Christ.
- Ask God to increase your awareness of what is ultimate through this teaching series.

## REVIEW QUIZ

Use these multiple-choice questions to measure what you learned from this lesson.

1. Which of the following was *not* one of the present emergencies that Machen brought to his audience's mind in "The Present Emergency and How to Meet It"?
  - a. Modernism
  - b. Unemployment
  - c. The end of the gold standard
  - d. The National Recovery Administration
2. Which statement summarizes Machen's main emphasis in "The Present Emergency and How to Meet It"?
  - a. The advancement of Westminster Theological Seminary
  - b. The everyday, tangible emergencies of society
  - c. Modern culture's conflict with the Bible
  - d. God and the unseen world
3. What did Machen consistently appeal to as the solution to the problems that he addressed throughout the messages in this lesson?
  - a. Education
  - b. Evangelism and missions
  - c. The Bible as God's Word
  - d. Mercy ministry
4. "The Present Emergency and How to Meet It" was the only message that Machen managed to broadcast before his death.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. On what occasion was Machen's inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary?
  - a. His becoming a first-time lecturer at the seminary
  - b. His becoming a full-fledged professor at the seminary
  - c. His becoming an assistant professor at the seminary
  - d. His becoming an adjunct professor at the seminary
6. What is the church's "ceaseless struggle," according to Allan MacRae?
  - a. "To combat modernism"
  - b. "To advance the gospel"
  - c. "To maintain the truth"
  - d. "To remain pure"

# Answer Key—The Present Emergency

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Before the Video

#### *What Do You Think?*

These are personal questions. The answers should be based on your own knowledge and experience.

#### *Scripture Reading*

- What realities in Jude's greeting before his call upon us to contend for the faith assure us that our contending is not in vain?

*Jude opens his letter with the blessed truth that Christians are those who are "called," and this reality means that we are "beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ." This truth ought to assure us that our contending for the faith is not in vain. In our contending, it is natural for us to expect the results of Jude's blessing on the recipients of his letter: "mercy, peace, and love."*

### During the Video

#### *The Present Emergency*

- What motivated Machen to deliver his series of radio messages?

*While one of the trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary thought that Machen's appearance on the radio program would raise awareness and perhaps support for the seminary, Machen saw it as an opportunity to preach the gospel.*

- What "present emergencies" did Machen call to mind in his first radio broadcast? What is the ultimate emergency?

*Machen mentioned three present emergencies to introduce what he considered to be the ultimate emergency. The first cause for alarm that people were then facing was the United States' moving away from the gold standard as the monetary system. Second, unemployment was still a reality only a few years after the Great Depression. Third, the National Recovery Administration was also on Americans' minds after the Great Depression. These perceived crises, however, were not the ultimate emergency in Machen's mind. The ultimate emergency is one's standing before God.*

#### *The Inaugural Lecture*

- What did Machen assert about the church and modern culture in his inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary?

*Machen pointed out that the world is fundamentally at odds with the Bible, and he also asserted that this fact has perplexed the church to such an extent that it would rather compromise than remain at odds. He alluded to the words of Jeremiah, who said that the unfaithful prophets and priests of Israel would cry, “Peace, Peace,” when there is no peace” (6:14).*

- How did Machen describe God in this inaugural lecture?

*Machen’s inaugural lecture as assistant professor highlighted his high view of God, contrasting Him with modernist views of God. Machen described God as a “mysterious, holy Person,” who by His free grace sent forth His Son to deliver us from this world and into a relationship with Him.*

### *Ultimate Issues*

- What has the church needed to do since its beginning?

*Allan MacRae said in reference to Machen, “All through the history of the church, there has been a ceaseless struggle to maintain the truth.” This reality is clearly seen in the New Testament in the ministries of such people as the Apostle Paul. Jude declared that we must “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3).*

- What are some examples from church history that support Allan MacRae’s statement about what the church has needed to do since its beginning?

*The church’s struggle to maintain the truth can be immediately seen in the pages of the New Testament, and it can be seen in the church’s writings throughout its history. The ecumenical creeds of the church were often formulated to defend the church against heresy. The Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds are examples of this phenomenon. The great confessions that were born out of the Protestant Reformation also sought to maintain biblical truth.*

### *After the Video*

- Because Machen opened his broadcast with the various things that were causing people anxiety at that time, what can be concluded about Machen’s character? Where does he direct people for answers?

*Machen brought to mind a number of things that were legitimately causing people concern at the time of his broadcast. He also acknowledged that in light of these things, “the world is weary and perplexed today.” But he drove home the idea that the discontentment that people were facing was a matter of the soul. Machen cared about the souls of others and had great sympathy for people in their trouble, which is why he directed them to a true resource for help: the Bible.*

- How was Machen’s consistency in conveying the same message demonstrated in this lesson?

*Dr. Nichols surveyed three moments in Machen’s life that spanned 1915 to 1935.*

*Over this twenty-year period, Machen maintained a consistent message that emphasized a reliance on the Word of God. In 1915 at his inaugural lecture as an assistant professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, he stressed the church's need to "decide for the Bible." In 1933, Machen echoed this conviction when he said, "The only place to stand is the Word of God." Finally, in his first radio broadcast in 1935, he appealed to his audience that the answers to the ultimate emergency that we all face are in "an old Book."*

- How might studying Machen's life and his work *Christianity and Liberalism* be helpful?

*Machen's first radio message was titled "The Present Emergency and How to Meet It." No matter what time we find ourselves in, there will always be a present emergency. Studying Machen and his work can therefore give us perspective on our own emergencies and wisdom for how to answer them. The consistent message of his life can help us to keep our eyes on the things that are ultimate.*

## REVIEW QUIZ

1. **A.**  
*The Great Depression was a severe economic crisis that resulted in the many anxieties that people faced in the 1930s, especially unemployment. The United States' move away from the gold standard and the National Recovery Administration were attempts to alleviate the dramatic economic downturn of the Great Depression. Modernism, a major concern for Machen, would not have been as prevalent in the minds of the American public.*
2. **C.**  
*Though Machen would particularly underscore modern culture's conflict with the Bible in his inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary, in this radio broadcast he explicitly identified "God and the unseen world" as the subject that he would be talking with his audience about.*
3. **C.**  
*The Bible indeed supports all these answers as necessary parts of the Christian life and perhaps solutions to a host of problems, but the one answer that underscores Machen's consistent message is the need to turn to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.*
4. **B.**  
*"The Present Emergency and How to Meet It" was the first of fifty broadcasts that Machen aired from 1935 to 1937. The last of these messages were aired after his death on January 1, 1937.*
5. **C.**  
*Machen began serving Princeton Theological Seminary as a lecturer. The occasion for the inaugural lecture from this lesson, however, was his becoming assistant pro-*

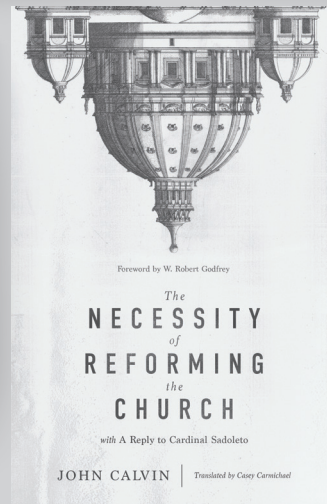
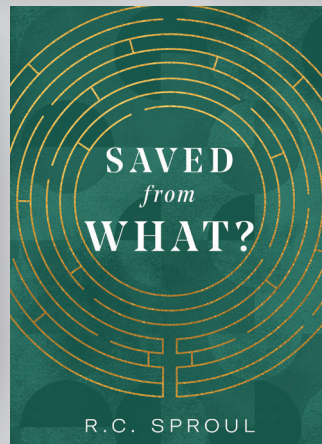
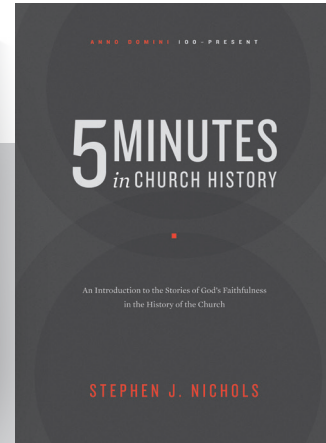
*fessor of New Testament literature and exegesis.*

6. **C.**

*MacRae, a student of Machen's, once said, "All through the history of the church, there has been a ceaseless struggle to maintain the truth." This idea is seen throughout church history and in the New Testament itself. The Apostles endeavored to prevent the spread of false teaching throughout the church and have called us to likewise contend for the faith.*



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the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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