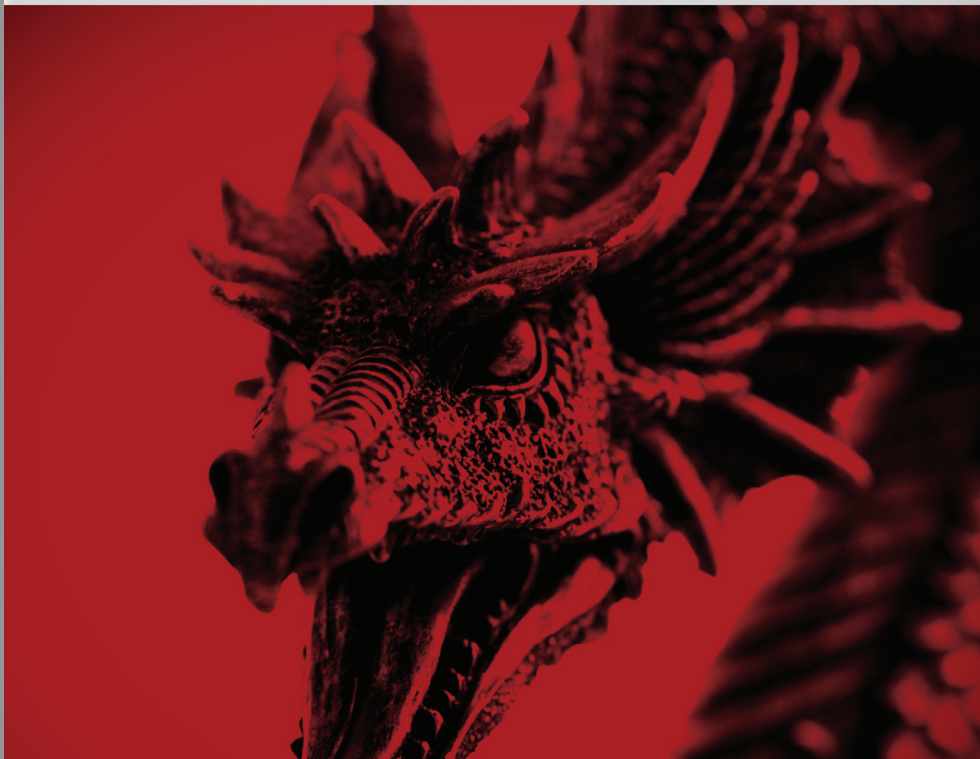


S T U D Y G U I D E



Silencing the Devil

by R.C. Sproul & John Gerstner



S T U D Y G U I D E

Silencing the Devil

A Fundamentals Debate

R.C. Sproul & John H. Gerstner



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I am certain that God
has given us our reason to discern
between truth and falsehood, and he that makes
no use of it but believes things
he knows not why, I say, it is by chance
that he believes truth, and not
by choice; and that I cannot but fear that God
will not accept this sacrifice of fools.

—William Chillingworth

Introduction

WHY A DEBATE?

Debate is a dying art. In times past, debate was honored. Students studied its nuances; audiences filled lecture halls as men combatted equipped only with ideas. Today, debates are an anachronism. Political “debates” have become mere joint press conferences, lacking the clash of ideas. What has brought on the demise of the debate?

Image is everything, or so it would seem. Our culture has moved from what Neil Postman calls the “Age of Typography” into the “Age of Television.” In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Postman explains that we are now more comfortable communicating through images. Not only do we find it difficult to retain interest in the visually dull event of a debate but we find it difficult to understand.

An interesting landmark occurred in 1960 on this odyssey toward becoming a visual society. John Kennedy and Richard Nixon were running neck and neck for the presidency. Their debate was carried on both television and radio. Polls showed that those who *watched* the debate felt Kennedy was the clear winner. Those who *listened* to the debate reached the opposite conclusion. On television Kennedy’s youthful good looks stood in stark contrast to Nixon’s evident nerves and five-o’clock shadow. Nixon lost the close election, an election, in his own words, sabotaged by make-up men.

A second, far more invidious force has led to the decline of the debate. We do not debate because we do not believe in truth. If no position is true, or if two contradictory points of view can both be true, a debate is fruitless. This issue is addressed in the first debate in this series between Dr. Sproul and Dr. Gerstner.

As we lost our belief in truth, we lost our skills in finding it. As we became moved by images and not by words, we lost our ability to follow lines of reasoning. We have traded in our tools for a false peace and banal entertainment.

Why then this debate? None of us lives in a vacuum. We are confronted daily with falsehoods that have as their source the father of lies, Satan. The battle of building the kingdom of God is first and foremost a battle of ideas. In terms of consensus, of perceived wisdom, the Christian is heavily undermanned. Yet we hold in our hands the most fierce of weapons, truth. We have as our ally, no, our Commander in Chief, the Sovereign of the universe, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

It is our hope that these debates will serve first to equip you and second to embolden you. We hope to shine the light of God's revelation and so expose the dark, for "this is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:19-21).

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide, like all those in the Ligonier Curriculum Series, is designed to complement the audio/video presentation. This particular series, *Silencing the Devil*, is challenging. The study guide should serve as an aid both to understand the debates and an aid to further study of the issues. As such, we encourage you to read through each chapter once before listening to the debate and once more afterward. The debates move swiftly. This guide is designed to make the debates easier to understand.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

As you work through this study guide, you will notice the different sections in each chapter. They are designed to help you explore the material, understand key insights, and apply them to your life. Each section has a specific purpose:

Why Is This Topic Important? This first section explains the significance of the issue at hand. It serves as an introduction of the implications of the truths defended by Dr. Gerstner. This will highlight the application into our lives of these complex problems.

What Is the Topic? In this section we will define the key terms of each debate. It is essential to understand the concepts that we will be studying. This section will also define exactly what Dr. Gerstner is seeking to prove. Those key terms not covered in this section are covered in a brief glossary at the end of this study guide.

What Is Dr. Sproul's Position? In this section you will find Dr. Sproul's fundamental argument laid out. It is important to remember that "Dr. Sproul's position" is not

really his position at all. He is playing a part, trying to argue for position he does not hold. We will highlight the arguments he is making in his role as devil's advocate.

What Is Dr. Gerstner's Position? This section lays out the basic arguments put forth by Dr. Gerstner in his defense of classical orthodoxy. It should be noted that on occasion, Dr. Gerstner grants hypothetically a premise that has not been proved and which he does not believe. This is a common practice in debate in which one person asserts essentially, "Even if you were right about premise A and B, conclusion C would not follow." Be sure to note when he uses this technique and do not confuse these with Dr. Gerstner's argument and viewpoint.

How Do These Views Relate? In this section you will study how the views of Dr. Sproul and Dr. Gerstner relate to each other. This serves as a summary of the debate as a whole, assessing which arguments failed and which succeeded.

Questions to Consider Each chapter concludes with ten questions. These are designed both to test your understanding of what you have heard and to push you toward further study. The last question in each chapter asks you to write out your arguments. This exercise should help you to understand how much you have learned and embolden you to use these arguments as you fulfill the call to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have" (1 Peter 3:15b).

Review Quiz The review quiz is a set of six multiple-choice questions that appear at the end of each lesson. 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.

Answer Key The answer key in the back of the study guide provides explanations for the reflection and discussion questions and answers to the multiple-choice questions in the review quiz. 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.

Can We Know Truth?

WHY IS TRUTH IMPORTANT?

Epistemology is a ten dollar word for a concept common to everyone. It is that branch of philosophy that investigates how we can know truths. Everyone has an epistemology, a set of standards by which he or she judges the truth or falsehood of any given proposition. As such it is not so much a branch of philosophy as the root. It is, in fact, at the root of all knowledge.

Most of us are not conscious of our own operating epistemology. We are unfamiliar with the issue, though we make judgments of truth every day. We stop our automobiles because we trust our senses to tell us that the light is red. We conclude that Socrates is mortal when we know that all men are mortal and Socrates is a man.

That you are preparing to watch these debaters is evidence that you have an epistemology. You will render a judgment, deciding that Dr. Gerstner is right, Dr. Sproul is right, or neither of them is right. The process of reading through this and watching (or listening to) the tapes is one long epistemological endeavor.

Why did we begin this series with truth? Whereas epistemology once focused on *how* we know truth, the issue has become “*Can* we know truth? If truth is either nonexistent or unattainable, then we are on a fool’s errand in trying to answer any questions. If we can establish the possibility of knowing truths, only then can we proceed to discover what is true and what is not. The question of truth is foundational, a necessary beginning.

The current consensus is that truth is either non-attainable or nonexistent. Ours is an age of skepticism. Our culture denies that we can know any truths. When we assert the truth of the Gospel, it falls on deaf ears. The world sneers, “If you believe the Gospel is true, it is true for you.” To be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us, we must persuade people that truth is a vital, primary concern.

Most of us experience profound boredom when we enter into the philosophical realm. We associate the study of philosophy with worldly wisdom. We see philosophers as isolated in ivory towers, set apart and irrelevant to our everyday lives. We take for granted our epistemologies, failing to examine them by the light of Scripture and plain reason.

It is often true that philosophers sink too deeply into the abstract. The issue of truth, however, influences all that we are, do, and think. Indeed, all of true philosophy is eminently practical. Buildings are only as safe as their foundation. Philosophy addresses foundational issues, and nothing is more foundational than truth. It is our hope that through these debates you will become first a champion of truth and then a champion of truths Dr. Gerstner is defending.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

“In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.’ ‘What is truth?’ Pilate asked” (John 18:37b-38).

It is interesting how Pilate phrased his question. He did not ask Jesus which truth He was speaking of. While we are not given Pilate’s tone, it is likely that his question was drenched in sarcasm. His question flowed not from a concern for truth, but a contempt for truth. Such is the position of the skeptic.

There are essentially two ways to look at truth. For most, truth is that which corresponds to what they perceive. Thus, people declare, “To me God is sunshine, to you God could be a tree.” Both of these can be true if truth is what any given person perceives. In such a system there necessarily cannot be any falsehood.

The second way to look at truth is to affirm that truth is that which corresponds to reality. If God is not, in fact, sunshine, to say He is would not correspond to reality and thus would not be true. That you are reading these words is truth because it corresponds to reality. The skeptic or relativist will ask, “Whose reality?” We answer, *The Reality*. There are no differing realities for different people. There is only one reality; all else is false. If I say, “Jesus is divine,” my statement is true or false depending not upon my perception, but upon reality. No matter how fervently and deeply I might believe the statement, I cannot make it true if in reality it is false. By the same token, if the reality is that Jesus is divine, no matter how vociferously I might deny it, such a belief cannot make it cease to be true.

There are some, however, who agree that truth is that which corresponds to reality, yet despair of ever discovering any truths. They reason that there is indeed one objective reality, independent of man’s thoughts. Truth is not at the whim of differing perceptions. These people believe, however, that such objective truth is unattainable.

We are unable, they assert, to get past our own distorted perceptions and into the objective. While they agree that there is true truth, truth which corresponds to reality, they join with the skeptics in declaring that we cannot attain truth.

If I believe that truth is what I perceive it to be and you believe that truth is that which corresponds with reality, how are we to discern who is correct? If I held to my position consistently (and no skeptic is ever totally consistent), I would have to say that we are both right. I would have to declare that if you perceive truth to be what corresponds to reality, then to you truth is that which corresponds to reality. I would find myself philosophically unable to persuade you of my “truth.” Perhaps I should even be embarrassed that I had tried. I would discover that I apparently held as a true truth (one corresponding to reality) that there are no true truths.

If I held that truth was unknowable but real, I would find myself in the same position. Do I know the truth that truth is unknowable?

Such traps await those who stray from true truth, that truth is that which corresponds to reality. As you play this tape, keep these truths in mind as our skeptic, Dr. Sproul, gets caught in his own traps while trying to persuade you of the truth that we can know no truth.

WHAT IS DR. SPROUL’S POSITION?

Dr. Sproul is in a difficult position, engaged in a debate in which he is to assert the truth that there is no truth. He believes that all truth is dependent upon the individual, yet is trying to persuade other individuals—his opponent and his audience—to believe what he believes. He prudently and quickly backs off from his original assertion that all truth is relative by conceding that words or propositions are meaningful. By “meaningful” he does not mean important or significant but that they have meaning. They can communicate.

If Dr. Sproul asserts “all truth is relative,” he may mean that “no truth is relative.” If all truth is relative, then the definitions of words are relative and all communication is lost. Dr. Sproul prudently concedes that it is the truth of a proposition, not its meaning, that is relative.

Dr. Sproul next asserts a different standard of truth, that truth is what he feels positive about. He explains that he has an “existential” view of truth. Existentialism holds that we must create our own truths. The only standard of truth by which we must judge is ourselves. This does not mean that on our own we must test truth claims against reason but that we must judge truth claims on our own *without* reason. There is no standard for us to use.

Dr. Sproul quickly abandons this position and with it any real relativism. He concedes that there is, indeed, objective truth and that we can know some objective truths, namely those truths that we can discover with our senses. Many truths, however, he claims are unknowable. Here he draws upon the work of the philosopher Kant.

Immanuel Kant, perhaps the most dominant philosopher of the modern era, divided existence into two parts, the phenomenal and the noumenal. The phenomenal world is the world that our senses perceive, the empirical world. What we see with our eyes and hear with our ears is real and knowable. The noumenal realm is where metaphysical ideas “reside.” According to Kant, residing in this noumenal realm is, among other things, God. This world is outside our inquiry.

While we may know things about the phenomenal world, according to Kant there is an unscalable wall between these two realms. The noumenal realm is so unknowable that we cannot be certain that even the rudiments of reason apply there, including the law of noncontradiction (that A cannot be A and non-A in the same time and in the same relationship) and the law of causality (that every effect must have a sufficient cause). To scale that wall, according to both Kant and Dr. Sproul, would involve an irrational leap.

Rather than allowing for causal connection between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, Dr. Sproul asserts an infinite chain of finite causes, a universe that is itself eternal. He was quick to point out that each of these causes in this causal chain is finite but that the chain itself is infinite. That is his explanation of the origin of the finite, phenomenal world.

It does not take long for this debate about truth to become a debate about the existence of God. Once Dr. Sproul concedes that we can know some truths, the focus shifted to the one truth he believes we cannot know. Dr. Sproul finds himself trying to give a satisfactory explanation for the world we see, within the world we see, so as to have no need for the God he cannot know.

Dr. Sproul does concede in the space of this brief debate not only that there are truths that we can know but also two truths about God that we can know. The first truth is that if such a being as God exists, it would be terribly meaningful and relevant to all (even to those who will not concede its relevance). The second truth we know about God is where He apparently lives, in Kant’s noumenal realm. Dr. Sproul will continue to find himself backpedaling and against the wall with both his opponent and his diabolical boss.

WHAT IS DR. GERSTNER'S POSITION?

The Greek philosopher Socrates had a peculiar style of teaching. He was not given to lecturing but taught through dialogue. He found that interaction was critical to educational progress. He understood, however, that for interaction to be effective, all participants must have in mind clear definitions of key terms. Dr. Gerstner understands this need and so begins this debate by seeking to pin down Dr. Sproul on some relative truth. It is not relative in the sense that truth is *dependent* upon the perceptions of individuals. Rather, truth is relative in the sense that it is *significant* to every individual; it relates to everyone. The sun will set this evening regardless of what I believe. That truth, however, has no bearing on me unless it relates to me.

Dr. Gerstner also took pains to define *meaning* with care. When Dr. Sproul says that a particular proposition is not “meaningful” to him, he means that he does not find it significant or important to him. Dr. Gerstner is quick to point out that any particular proposition is meaningful if he understands what it means. It has a meaning. Dr. Gerstner in so doing demonstrates that the meanings of words are objective and thus we can effectively communicate.

Once Dr. Sproul concedes that the statement “There is a God” has meaning, he is prepared to discuss whether the meaningful statement is true and whether it could be demonstrated. Dr. Gerstner understands that if he could demonstrate one objective truth, then he will have won the battle.

Dr. Gerstner quickly wins the concession that we can know truth in the meaning of propositions. He soon persuades Dr. Sproul that we can know truths through the use of our senses. At this point the debate is essentially finished. Dr. Sproul, however, maintains that we cannot know the truth of the most significant of questions, namely the existence of God. Dr. Gerstner proceeds to demonstrate that very truth, using the cosmological argument.

Dr. Gerstner argues that what we can know from our senses (the existence of the physical universe) tells us something about that which cannot be known through our senses (the existence of God). If there is a universe, which we know, there must be a sufficient cause. Dr. Gerstner deduces this cause must be a God who is self-existent.

The apostle Paul makes the same argument in his epistle to the Romans: “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). While Kant calls the move from phenomenal to the noumenal a gratuitous leap, Paul shows that it is a necessary conclusion.

Dr. Gerstner next gives a hypothetical concession that the world itself is eternal. That, in itself, is not a sufficient cause for the order of the universe. Dr. Gerstner continues to pursue several avenues to demonstrate that God must exist. This is the one truth an advocate for the devil will most vehemently deny. Having won the possibility of truth, Dr. Gerstner proceeds to the most significant truth. That particular debate will begin in earnest with the second session.

HOW DO THESE VIEWS RELATE?

As Dr. Gerstner pointed out in the debate, there once was a time in the history of ideas that when a person was forced to choose between holding that the universe either was created by God or by nothing. In the same manner, there once was a time when there was no need to demonstrate that truth was both objective and attainable. In neither instance is this now the case. Skepticism did not first appear in the twentieth century, but it has become the dominant motif of the current Western worldview.

What makes skepticism so dangerous is that it disallows any truth claims. The Christian faith is built upon truth claims. What makes skepticism so foolish is that it so quickly falls of its own weight. It is inherently self-contradictory. It essentially makes the statement “All statements are false.” As such, Dr. Sproul beats a hasty retreat throughout the debate. First, he must concede that words have objective meanings. Still he denies words can reflect reality. He then concedes that his own standards of truth, himself and/or positive feelings, are not sufficient. Finally, he concedes that we can learn truths from our senses, but claims we can know nothing we cannot experience with our senses.

Such a claim also falls of its own weight. Can the statement “Only those things experienced through the senses can be known to be true” be known through the senses?

Dr. Sproul’s next defense is to call upon Immanuel Kant. Dr. Gerstner is wise to point out that we are not bound to accept as fact what Kant says. This type of argument is an informal fallacy called in the field of logic “the argument from authority.” In such an argument, an authority is quoted as if the sheer power of his or her name were enough to settle the argument. Sadly, we not only fall for such arguments, we sometimes use them as well. There is one authority, however, to whom we all must bow. If it can be proved that God has made a particular truth claim, we as His creatures are obligated to believe it.

Immanuel Kant, for all his genius, was prone to error. Contrary to his assertions, we can move from the visible to the invisible.

What conclusion have we reached? There is objective truth. We can know objective truth. The consensus, the common wisdom holds otherwise. As with all error,

skepticism is also a failure practically. We all believe in objective truth when we stop at a red light. The light cannot be red for me and green for the person behind me. When we cross the street, we cannot declare that the on-rushing truck is not there “for me.” In the arena of ethics, we are not satisfied with murder being wrong for you and right for me if you are the victim.

Skepticism is not born out of a sincere frustration over the inability to discover truth. Its chief motivation is moral. If we create our own truth then we cannot be held accountable; I need not bend my knee to God and His law. While I must sacrifice truth, that is a small price to pay for freedom from God.

The next debate will focus on God’s existence and the evidence for it.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why are people so hesitant to deal with the most basic issues, such as truth?

2. How do feelings relate to issues of truth? Can feelings be true or false? Why?

3. Are there any truths that are relative? Are there any truths we cannot know?

4. Is epistemology a legitimate place to start our inquiry? Where else might we start?

5. Is there a noumenal realm? Is it exempt from the law of causality? Is it exempt from the law of noncontradiction?

6. List five truths of which you are certain yet cannot be learned from sense perception. How are you certain of them?

7. How can you practically apply what you have learned? What is the relationship between philosophy and your everyday life? Between philosophy and theology?

8. What do you do when your perception of reality differs from someone else's perception?

9. Can we be certain of the law of causality? Can we be certain of the law of noncontradiction?

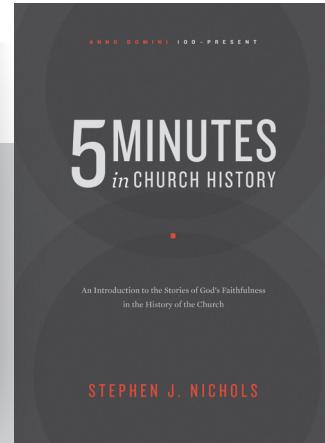
10. Write in three to four paragraphs how you would respond to the assertion “All truth is relative.”

REVIEW QUIZ

1. What does epistemology investigate?
 - a. How we can know God
 - b. How we can know truth
 - c. How we can prove God
 - d. How we can find truth
2. What did Pilate skeptically ask Jesus?
 - a. How can I know truth?
 - b. Are you king of the Jews?
 - c. What is truth?
 - d. How can I be saved?

3. What side of the debate does Dr. Sproul take?
 - a. The Christian
 - b. The unbeliever
 - c. The devil's advocate
 - d. The layperson
4. In the debate, which statement did Dr. Sproul argue was relative?
 - a. There is no truth.
 - b. There is a God.
 - c. Truth can't be known.
 - d. Truth is irrelevant.
5. In what sense does Dr. Gerstner say truth is "relative"?
 - a. In dependence
 - b. In significance
 - c. In meaning
 - d. In purpose
6. What is skepticism born out of?
 - a. Silence
 - b. Sincerity
 - c. Morality
 - d. Error

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