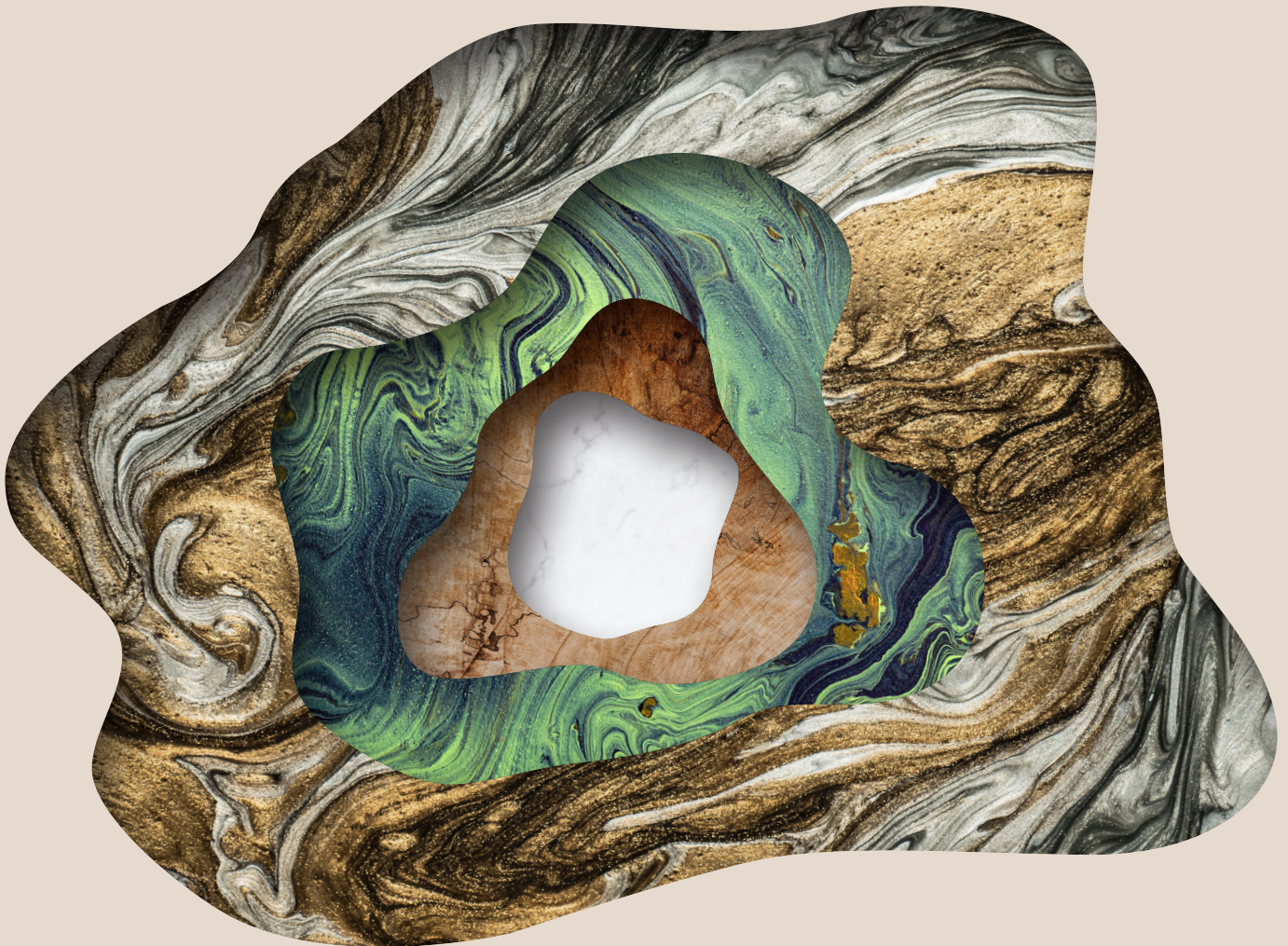


S T U D Y G U I D E

CHRISTIANITY *and* LIBERALISM

J. Gresham Machen



Christianity and Liberalism

STUDY GUIDE



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Christianity and Liberalism Study Guide

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How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide includes a chapter synopsis, a lesson objective, key passages, key points, and discussion questions from each chapter in J. Grehsam Machen's classic *Christianity and Liberalism*, as well as questions that focus on a relevant passage of Scripture from each chapter. Participants should first read each corresponding chapter of the book in order to make the best use of this guide.

Chapter Synopsis: This section summarizes the material in the chapter and provides a reminder of what the chapter covered. It serves to help readers remember what they've already read in the book.

Lesson Objective: This section explains the purpose of the chapter and the intended outcome of the study guide lesson.

Key Passages: This section quotes several passages from the chapter so that readers can remember some of the more significant things the author said. It can also serve as a starting point for discussion if the group leader would like to ask questions or provide thoughts related to excerpts from the book.

Key Points: This section outlines many of the basic ideas that the author mentioned in the chapter. It helps readers recall not just the big idea of the chapter but also its supporting ideas and their flow.

Scripture Reading: This section highlights one of the chapter's key points in God's Word. It helps readers identify the scriptural basis of important Christian doctrines and develops their ability to understand Scripture through questions about the reading. These questions are also ideal for group study.

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Reflection Questions: This section provides readers with questions that could be asked of themselves or in a small-group setting. The questions are designed to help readers understand the chapter and apply that knowledge to their lives.

Prayer: This section closes the study with an opportunity to come before the Lord in prayer based on what readers have learned.

Introduction

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

Can Christianity survive in the modern world? For many church leaders a hundred years ago, that was the urgent question. Traditional Christian teaching seemed outdated in a culture dominated by science. Liberal theology, or *modernism*, responded by trying to update the Christian faith. It got rid of any teachings that science might question. Doctrines such as Jesus' death and resurrection had to go.

J. Gresham Machen argued, though, that liberal theology was not Christianity. It was another religion, opposed to the Christian faith. The urgent conflict, then, was not between science and Christianity. Instead, it was between true Christianity and a liberal religion that had abandoned the gospel. Machen wanted his readers to see the difference because their souls were at stake.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

This chapter will help you understand Machen's reason for writing this book so that you can better grasp the role of doctrinal truth in Christianity and reflect on the cultural influences that threaten Christian truth in our own time.

KEY PASSAGES

The purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and clearly as possible, in order that the reader may be aided in deciding it for himself. (p. 1)

In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive

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because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called “modernism” or “liberalism.” (pp. 1–2)

From every point of view, therefore, the problem in question is the most serious concern of the Church. What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age? (p. 5)

In the midst of all the material achievements of modern life, one may well ask the question whether in gaining the whole world we have not lost our own soul. (p. 14)

In setting forth the current liberalism, now almost dominant in the Church, over against Christianity, we are animated, therefore, by no merely negative or polemic purpose; on the contrary, by showing what Christianity is not we hope to be able to show what Christianity is, in order that men may be led to turn from the weak and beggarly elements and have recourse again to the grace of God. (p. 14)

KEY POINTS

Doctrinal Truth (pp. 1–3): Christianity is not just a human tradition. The church does not exist merely to support programs and attract more members. Instead, it exists to proclaim a message. This message, because it is precious, must be defended using clear language and logic. While liberalism sounded Christian, it rejected the doctrines of the church. Liberals believed only in the ordinary processes of nature.

Christ and Culture (pp. 2–6): Human culture can put enormous pressure on the church. In Machen’s time, the cultural authority of science caused many churches to abandon the gospel. Science still has great influence today. While we can appreciate many of its benefits, we must recognize that cultural pressures can pose a mortal danger to our faith.

Apostasy (pp. 6–11): Liberal Christians, according to Machen, did not just have a poor strategy for engaging the culture. These church leaders had adopted a new religion. They had turned away from Christ and were leading others away from their Savior. We need to know Christian truth so that we will not be deceived.

Ethics and Education (pp. 11–14): Daily life in Machen’s time had been transformed by technology, and this affected things such as education and ethics. In

INTRODUCTION

his scientific age, Machen argued, schools trained people to think only about their material well-being. Most people thought about morality in utilitarian terms—whatever seemed to bring the most material benefits to the most people was right. Science had brought many comforts, but its influence had also led the culture into spiritual and moral poverty.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Corinthians 15:3–8 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

- In this chapter, Machen wrote that many Christian doctrines teach things that are open to scientific investigation. Can science study the truths that the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, says are “of first importance”? If so, how? How might this passage help you defend the doctrines you believe?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

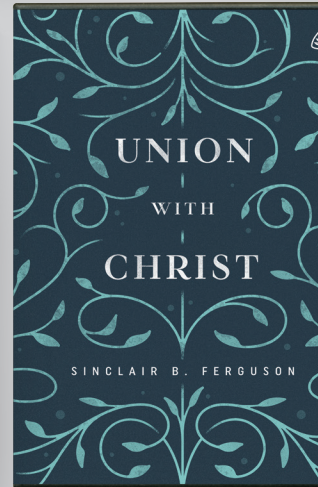
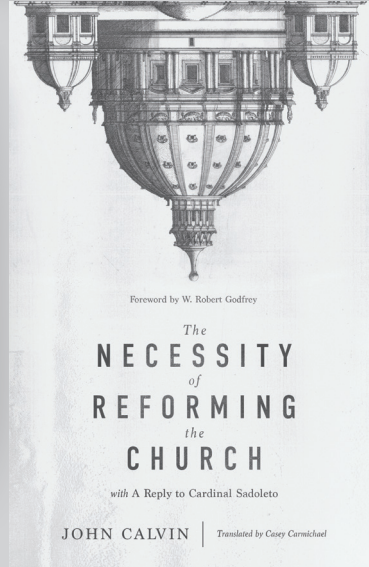
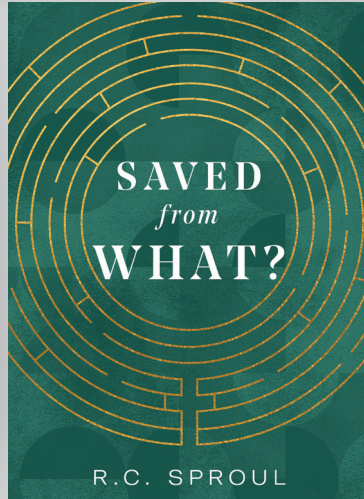
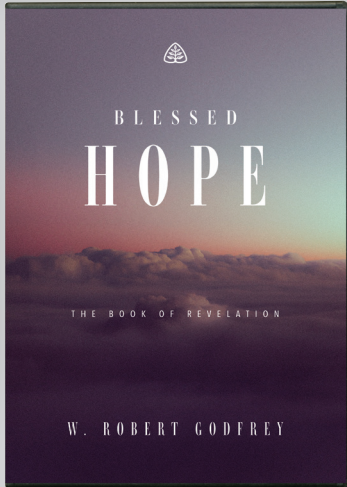
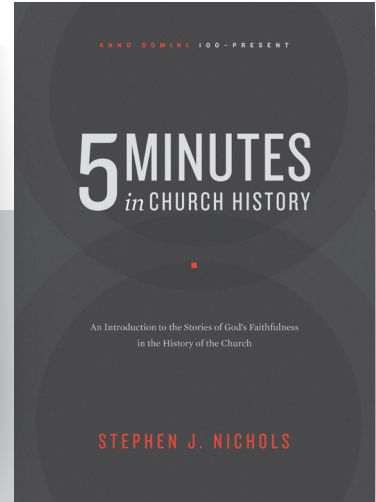
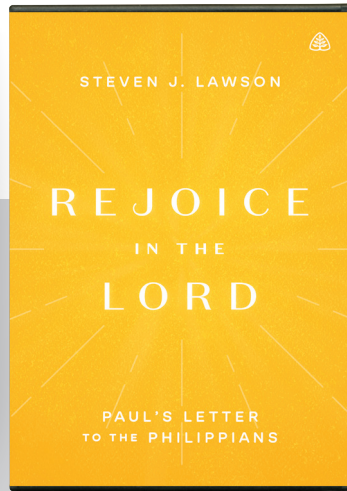
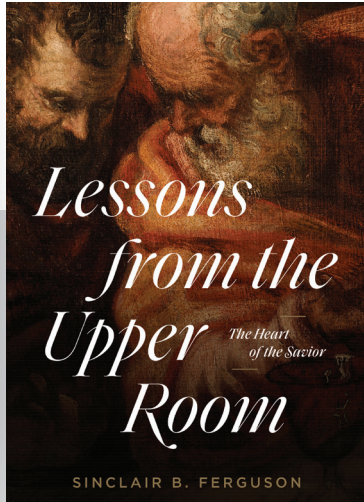
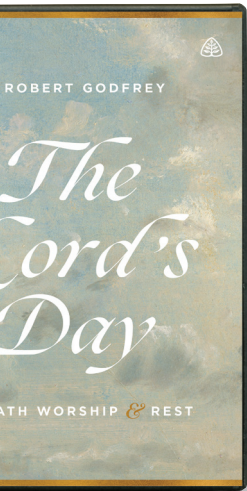
1. Why did Machen believe that liberalism was another religion rather than simply a mistaken form of Christianity? What were the beliefs of this alternative religion?
2. Liberalism gained power in the church, Machen suggested, because people wanted to avoid conflict. Why did he believe this?
3. Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* a hundred years ago. Do you think that science poses as great a challenge to the church today? Why or why not?
4. According to Machen, science seems threatening partly because we give it too much credit. It may have made our lives far richer materially, but he believed it had also brought spiritual decline. How do his criticisms of modern education illustrate this point?

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PRAYER

- Praise God for revealing the truth about Himself and His works of salvation in His Word.
- Confess if you have denied these truths, verbally or in your heart, out of a fear of other people or cultural pressure.
- Thank God that the gospel can be held out to all people, in every age and culture, and that it has been proclaimed for two thousand years.
- Ask God for a deepening knowledge and love of His truth and a growing ability to explain why you believe it.

We want to see men and women around the world connect
the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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