

# Series: “Living Christian Truth in a Doubting World”

West Side Christian Church Next Steps Summer Study

Series Webpage: [www.RichKnopp.com/living-christian-truth](http://www.RichKnopp.com/living-christian-truth)

## Part 3

### Challenges to Knowing Truth About God

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#### Introduction

- A. Conflicting worldviews: Different answers to life’s biggest questions.
- B. Key Scriptures for Christians:
  - 1. 1 Peter 3:15 “Always be ready to give a defense ....”
  - 2. Colossians 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” (ESV)
  - 3. 2 Corinthians 10:5 “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God .... ” (ESV)
- C. **Two notable worldviews raised against the knowledge of God.**
  - 1. **Modernism:** Emphasizes OBJECTIVE truth that is discovered by reason and science (which are often used to *attack* Christianity).
  - 2. **Postmodernism:** Expresses SKEPTICISM about any objective truth; truth depends on our perspective (relativism).
- D. **Types of truth.**
  - 1. **Objective** truth.
    - a. Truth is OUTSIDE of us.
    - b. We DISCOVER truth.
  - 2. **Subjective** truth.
    - a. Truth arises FROM us (personal and cultural).
    - b. We CONSTRUCT truth.

#### I. MODERNISM

- A. A prominent worldview since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (the Enlightenment) that emphasizes:
  - 1. Objective truth can, and must, be known by reason and SCIENCE.
  - 2. CERTAINTY.
  - 3. Consequences for Christian faith: “scientific”? “certainty”?
- B. **Two branches** of Modernism: **Deism** (with God) and **Secular Humanism** (no God).
- C. **DEISM:** Accepts a creator God that does NOT act within the universe; there are no miracles (e.g., Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Voltaire).
  - 1. **Dangers and doubts** generated by **DEISM**.

- a. God is DISTANT and uninvolved with us (e.g., most American teens have “moral therapeutic deism” [Smith, *Soul Searching*, 162-163]).
- b. Christian faith is just a MENTAL thing (“I believe THAT ...”).

## 2. Initial Responses to DEISM.

- a. The abstract “God” of the philosopher is not the God of the Bible, who is personal, loving, and incarnate (John 1:1,14; 3:16).

“The God that many *reject* is often the unbiblical God they *project*” (*Truth About God*, 37).

- b. “Immanuel”: God WITH us (Isaiah 7:14; Matt. 1:20-23).
- c. The promised gift of the HOLY SPIRIT (“abba” in Rom. 8:15; 1 John 3:24).
- d. Christian faith includes intellectual and historical considerations that point us to a PERSONAL relationship with an active God.

## D. SECULAR HUMANISM (Optimistic Atheism).

1. Only *physical* realities and causes exist.
2. God is REJECTED by reason and science (e.g., Richard Dawkins; Bill Nye the science guy).
3. Cultural presence.
  - a. 24 % of Americans: truth can only be determined by science and proof.
  - b. 42% of teens say the Bible and science are in CONFLICT.
  - c. 13 % of GenZ say they are “atheists.”
4. **Dangers and doubts** generated by **SECULAR HUMANISM**.
  - a. “Christianity is irrational.” (vs. Paul in Acts 26:25)
  - b. “Science gives FACTS; religion only has FAITH.”
  - c. “Science and Christianity conflict, and science WINS” (e.g., Big Bang vs. the Bible; evolution vs. creation).
  - d. “You must choose between science and the Bible.”
5. **Initial responses to Secular Humanism**
  - a. Most pioneers of modern science were creationists and many were strong Christians.
  - b. Science requires PRESUPPOSITIONS that science itself cannot explain or justify.
  - c. Scientists sometimes make claims that *go far beyond* what science itself can justify, so they have their own “FAITH commitments.”
  - d. Science and Christianity AGREE on some major issues.
    - (1) The universe **BEGAN**.
    - (2) The universe began **JUST RIGHT** for human life.
    - (3) Life requires information (**INTELLIGENCE**).
  - e. Darwinian (naturalistic) evolution is totally irrelevant to explaining the *origin* of life.
  - f. Darwinian evolution, while true in limited ways, faces major problems.
  - g. If all reality is merely matter in motion, atheism cannot adequately explain free will, human consciousness, moral obligations for human equality, or even the capacity of reason itself to give us truth.
6. **Biblical connections** (Isa. 5:21; Mark 10:23-25 [the rich]; Lk. 12:15-23 [the rich man]; the Epicureans in Acts 17:18-32; Phil. 3:17-21).

## II. POSTMODERNISM

- A. Basic position:
  - 1. Skepticism about any objective truth; “truth” is *relative* to our perspective (relativism).
  - 2. Truth is not *discovered*, but \_\_\_\_\_ **CONSTRUCTED** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 3. Truth is often a “power play” to oppress others.
- B. Examples.
  - 1. Jean-Francois Lyotard and his “incredulity to metanarratives” (vs. God’s message).
  - 2. American adults: 66 % reject or doubt the existence of absolute moral truth.  
Born-again Christians: 49 % in 2025 (vs. 57% in 2020)
- C. **Dangers and doubts** generated by **POSTMODERNISM** (relativism):
  - 1. “No truth applies to everyone; everyone has their own truth.”
  - 2. “Christianity is just one spiritual way among many.”
  - 3. “Jesus cannot be the *only* way to God, even if there is a God.”
  - 4. “The Bible’s morality is ancient and needs to be updated.”
- D. **Initial responses to Postmodernism.**
  - 1. Commendations:
    - a. *Cultural* diversity is valuable and God-intended; so \_\_\_\_\_ **VALUE** \_\_\_\_\_ it.
    - b. Our knowledge IS limited; so be \_\_\_\_\_ **HUMBLE** \_\_\_\_\_.
    - c. Truth sometimes IS a power play; so \_\_\_\_\_ **ACKNOWLEDGE** \_\_\_\_\_ this.
  - 2. Criticisms:
    - a. Our deepest moral intuitions \_\_\_\_\_ **CONTRADICT** \_\_\_\_\_ relativism.
    - b. No one actually lives as a complete “relativist.” It forces us to be \_\_\_\_\_ **INCONSISTENT** \_\_\_\_\_.
    - c. Relativism cannot justify any moral criticism or our moral obligations for social justice and humanity equality.
- E. **Biblical connections** (Deut. 12:8; Isa. 5:20).

NOTE: For devotional times this week, read the Scriptures in this outline. For next week (July 7) read chapter 3 in *Truth About God: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* pp. 41-58.

### Reflection and Discussion Questions “Challenges to Knowing Truth About God”

- 1. Express **one word** that describes your reaction to this lesson. Explain why you chose this.
- 2. **What did you learn** that might **help** you interact more effectively with someone you know?
- 3. Briefly describe **Deism**. Do you know of anyone who thinks this way? Are there people even in the church who seem to have this perspective? What responses would you give to them?
- 4. Briefly describe **Secular Humanism**. Can you think of anyone now, or in your past, with this view? What is their take on religion or Christianity? How might you respond to their doubts?
- 5. Briefly describe **Postmodernism** (or relativism). Where do you see this perspective in our culture? Do you see it in professing Christians? Try to explain.
- 6. What **biblical connections or characters** seem to be relevant to these three worldviews? (You could take a quick look at the sections on “biblical connections.”)
- 7. What **questions** or other **comments** do you have about this lesson?