INTRODUCTION: The passage in I Chronicles is set in the historical context of when David was about to become the new king of Israel. The military leaders of the various tribes met in Hebron for the event. An expression is given concerning the leaders of Issachar which is not recorded of the other tribes. It is said that they “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” This would include an understanding of the political, social, military and religious conditions existing among the people. Their polls indicated that “all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David King.” (12:38), the result being “there was joy in Israel.” (12:40).

David proved to be a “man after God’s own heart” (I Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22), and Paul would eulogize him by saying that “after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep.” (Acts 13:36). Scripture tells of the importance of “knowing the times” (Romans 13:11) in which we live. The Jerusalem Council met to deal with the relationship of the Gospel to the Jew-Gentile controversy over the Mosaic Law. Paul’s evangelism method was to the Jew-first. His missionary strategy was to go to the large metropolitan areas to plant new churches. Then out of these areas the message would filter out to the rural districts. Various church councils have met through the centuries to address doctrinal disputes. The Protestant Reformation under Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Zwingli served their times well. The issues between Calvinism and Arminianism was hammered out at the Synod of Dort. The Fundamentalist-Modernist issues here in the States
began in the early nineteen hundreds and are still going on today. All of these had required leaders to know or understand the times in which they were living, and the issues confronting the spread of the Gospel.

I. THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

Radical changes have occurred in the twentieth century. The values and principles that shaped twentieth century thought and culture are now being cast aside as being old-fashioned. Western culture is entering a new phase which scholars are calling “postmodern.” A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that according to one writer is perhaps “as great as that which marked off the modern world from the middle ages.” Signs of this revolution appear everywhere. From university campuses to television screens, from the thought-forms of computer networks to the lifestyles of average Americans. As the twenty-first century begins, there is a sense that a particular way of thinking is disappearing and that we are on the verge of something new.

What is less clear is whether the change is good or bad. On the one hand, the classic example of a society built on modernistic materialism, atheism, and social engineering has collapsed. The U.S.S.R. and its communistic system has failed to erect the city of man. Traditional American ideals of free market economics and individual freedoms are sweeping the globe. Christianity which not only survived communism, but was a major force in its demise, has gained a new hearing worldwide as multitudes discover the Bible and turn to its teachings.

On the other hand, societies around the world are segmenting into antagonistic groups. Tribalism, terrorism, and ethnic cleansing are splitting the world apart. Here in America, “Culture Wars” are taking place on a daily basis over moral issues such as abortion and euthanasia, and intellectual issues such as education and cultural and racial diversity.

Diverse groups or communities now make up the cultural landscape. You have feminists, gays, African-Americans, pro-lifers, pro-choicers, etc. You have, Federal rights, State rights, women’s rights, civil rights, animal rights, environmental and plant rights, Social Security rights, Medical care or patients rights. American culture, as existing at the turn of the twentieth century, has broken apart into multiple segments not based on geographics, but on ideologies and traditions. And the only thing that is holding this country together is “the economy, stupid.” If or when this economic prosperity, which is the envy of the world, should collapse, these segments of the populace will turn on each other like the different segments of the Soviet Union did and are yet doing. This may well set the stage for the final stage of the collapse of the city of man known as humanism.
Charles Dickens began his book, The Tale of Two Cities, with these words, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” He was describing the era of the French Revolution, which in many ways was the beginning of modernism. But his words apply to nearly every era. Each age has its greatness and its weaknesses, its possibilities and its problems. But these differ from age to age. In order to seize the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls, Christians need the wisdom of the tribe of Issachar, “to understand the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”

A. Existentialism: The Post-Modern Way of Thinking

According to existentialism, there is no inherent meaning or purpose in life. There is no such thing as objective truth. The world is absurd and pointless. To discover one’s humanity one must choose whatever absurdity appeals to him most. While there is no ready-made meaning in life, individuals can create meaning for themselves. This is called “finding oneself” or “getting in touch with yourself.” Thus by their own free choices and deliberate actions, human beings can create their own order of meaning for themselves. To use Biblical language, one may self-determine good and evil, and become one’s own god. This meaning, however, has no valid truth for anyone else. No one can provide a meaning for someone else. Everyone must determine his or her own meaning which must remain private, personal, and unconnected to any sort of objective truth or law. We are what we choose. It does not matter what we choose, only that we choose. To choose not to choose is itself a choice.

Existentialism provides the rationale for contemporary relativism. Since everyone creates his or her own meaning, every meaning is equally valid. Thus we hear, “What’s true for you may not be true for me.” The application of this thinking to the area of religion is that one’s religion becomes a purely private affair which should not or cannot be imposed on anyone else. Since Christianity is a converting religion which claims that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life,” it is obvious that it will clash with current thought.

Moral values are thus created by one’s own self. The best example of an existential ethic can be found in those who approve of abortion but call themselves “pro-choice.” To them, it makes no difference what the woman decides, only that she have the right to make an authentic choice whether or not to have the baby. Whatever she chooses is right for her. “Pro-choice” advocates are not interested in any objective information that might have a bearing on the morality of abortion. Data about fetal development, facts about how abortions are performed, philosophical arguments about the sanctity of life, and such objective evidence is irrelevant and can have no bearing on the woman’s private choice.
Those who are “pro-life” should not think they can convert “pro-choicers” merely by overwhelming them with hard evidence and rational arguments. Pro-choice people are existential. They are irrational.

While existentialism began in the nineteenth century, it had emerged as a major philosophical movement by the middle of the twentieth century. It is no longer confined to the academic world but has entered the popular culture. It has become the philosophy of the soap operas and the television talk shows. It has reshaped political life and is transforming the legal system in our country. Our judicial system was set up to interpret laws according to the absolutes of constitutional law. But this system can only work if society and the courts believe in absolutes. Today, post-modern legal theory teaches that the Constitution is not a document setting forth absolute principles, but is an organism that must be continually reinterpreted as society evolves. Judicial activists assume the power to define new rights never mentioned in the Constitution. This is done to meet the needs of a changing society. Following this reasoning, the Supreme Court legalized abortion, striking down all law restricting abortion, in the name of a new defined “right to privacy.”

B. The Shift In World View

In order to understand how we got to where we are today, it helps to relate to the different phases which have occurred in our Western civilization. To simplify matters, we will divide them under three headings. (1) The Pre-modern, (2) The Modern, (3) The Post-Modern.

1. Pre-Modern

In the pre-modern phase of Western Civilization, people believed in the supernatural. Individuals and the culture as a whole believed in God (or gods). They believed that life in this world owed its existence and meaning to an unseen spiritual realm beyond the natural senses of man. This phase was not characterized by a single dominate world view. It was a complex tension filled era with competing ideologies. They included (1) the mythological paganism of the Greeks and Romans; (2) the classical rationalism of the Grecian philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; (3) the Biblical revelation.

Myth, human rationalism (natural theology) and Christianity defined the western world for centuries. Not everyone who believed in the supernatural was a Christian. Biblical Christianity was
always in tension with its culture. Mythological superstitions and humanistic logic have continually tempted and infiltrated the church. Whenever Christianity seeks to be embraced by the prevailing culture, it will cease to be Biblical Christianity. The unified belief of these ideologies in the supernatural did assert that nature is God’s creation. But there is a reality beyond the natural - the realm of the spirit which is the source of all true values and controls the destinies of human beings. Neither humanity nor nature is autonomous. All are utterly dependent on the sovereignty of God.

2. Modern

Then came the modern age. Sinful human beings have always desired autonomy, to be free of all restrictions, to focus on this present world instead of the world to come. The opening chapters of Genesis reveal that. The age of the Renaissance came about and thinkers began to view Biblical Christianity on the same level as pagan mythology. Human achievements in science and technology seemed to open up a new age of progress and enlightenment, thus making the wisdom of the past long outdated. These emerging sciences had their origins both in the Biblical view that nature was the good and orderly work of a personal Creator, and the classical rational view that absolute rational laws govern nature. Both views embraced objective, revealed truths outside of and beyond individuals and society.

The modern world, properly speaking, began in the 1700’s with what became known as the Age of Enlightenment. The progress of science accelerated so rapidly that it seemed as if science could explain everything. There was no need to appeal to the supernatural. There was a natural, rational explanation. The thinkers embraced the classic rationalism and gradually relegated both pagan mythology and Biblical Christianity to an era produced by ignorance from living in “unenlightened” times.

Christianity was being pushed into the background and many churches compromised their Biblical faith and began reinterpreting their faith according to the new enlightened findings of science. Liberal theology was invented in the German Schools of higher rationalism and resulted in what became known as modernism.

While the modern age began in the 1700's it reached its peak early in the 1900's. War began to break out in the seminaries and the churches, resulting in the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy which is still with us today.
3. The Post-Modern

In the late 1800's, a new ideology began to emerge. It rests upon the foundation of the new philosophy of existentialism. If the modern era could be called the Age of Enlightenment, the new Post-Modern age can be referred to as the Age of Un-enlightenment. Since post-modernists maintain “there are no absolutes,” they not only reject Christian supernaturalism they also reject modern rationalism as being myths. Since both of these claim to be true and the post-modernists claim that truth has no absolute objective value, then they are both illusions or myths as held by modern thinkers.

According to a recent poll, 66 percent of Americans now believe that “there is no such thing as absolute truth.” That’s startling. Among young adults, the percentage is even higher, 72 percent of these between the ages of 18 and 25 do not believe absolutes exist. What is even more confusing and shocking is that 53 percent of evangelical Christians say there are no absolutes. At the same time 85 percent say they believe in God.

This modern mind-set is opposed to objective, logical, linear thinking. It seeks reality in subjective experience. It sees no problem in holding to mutually inconsistent ideas since there is no absolute truth. Reality is what I want or feel it to be. One pastor told of a young man who said he believed in Jesus as his Lord and Savior, held to Reformed theology, and believed in reincarnation. He loved Jesus, John Calvin, and Shirley McClain. When he was asked how and why he could hold to such contradictory ideas, he replied, “because I want to. I like them all.”

(a) Experience defines doctrine (belief).

The object of existentialism is to destroy objective, foundational, propositional truth. The foundations of society are crumbling. In the Pre-Modern era, it was believed that if you held to the right doctrine, you could experience the true God. Now in the Post-modern era, it is held that if you are experiencing God, you must be holding to the right doctrine or teaching. But if asked how do you know if you are correctly experiencing God, the reply is “My heart tells me so!”

The polls reveal that the average church visitor has made up his or her mind in the first five minutes into a service as to whether he will come back or not. What is it that primarily influenced their decision? By what they felt! And if you don’t have the bright lights shining, and the bass band sounding at the top of the decibel scale, they will conclude the place to be dead, and the Spirit is not there. If they stay long enough for the minister to say “turn with me in your bibles and begin's to expound upon Biblical objective truths, they feel this dulls the spirit of the service. Their minds
are fried. They cannot and do not think through rational thought. The mind is viewed as a hindrance to the spirit. We are no longer dealing with rational people, but with irrational people.

In the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the past you were at least dealing with rational thought. The fundamentalist held to the reliability and trustworthiness of Biblical revelation in all things regarding doctrine and practice. The modernist believed in the trustworthiness of natural scientific discoveries in all things, and if these discoveries contradicted the Biblical record, then it was to be altered to fit the latest theory. Both positions held there was such a thing as objective truth. But with the post-modern culture, you are no longer dealing with rational thought.

Who are the respected intellectuals today? Not the Aristotles, not the Augustines, nor the Calvins, or the Edwards, or the Newtons. The intellectual today is the couch potato, laying on the couch with a beer in one hand and a remote control in the other. He is constantly switching from channel to channel, picking up the Oprah’s the Jerry Springers, who display people and events which previous generations could only find in the side show of a traveling circus. Someone may observe that “those shows do not make any sense.” They aren’t supposed to! They are for entertainment and escapism. They have no absolutes. The only absolute things which they are sure of is that there are no absolutes. To which it might be asked “are you sure about that?”

Billy Graham’s campaign’s would represent the Pre-Modern era with his “The Bible says” approach. Phil Donahue would represent the Modern era with his appeal to the natural sciences and human reason. And Jerry Springer would represent the Post-Modern era with his free-for-all irrationalism. So the post-modern couch potato just keeps changing the channels until he experiences something which excites his emotional taste buds.

(b) Biblical exposition has lost its appeal.

There are some discerning people who observe that post-modern churches do not want to be preached to from the Word, but to be entertained through various other mediums. But this does not get to the root of the problem. Why do they want to be entertained? The root is existentialism which denies objective truth. Thus they seek to be amused rather than mused. To muse means to think or reflect upon. The prefix “a” means no or none. To amuse is to escape having to think about something.

Our church leaders do not understand the times. As they seek to find out what the culture wants to experience from a religious service, they are being led away from objective Biblical truth. Instead of converting the culture, the culture is converting the church. The foundations are being destroyed. American Christianity is like a river a mile wide and only an inch deep, and that is the way the culture wants it.
My wife and I attended a Baptist Church in Gatlinburg, Tennessee a few years ago on a Sunday morning. The church was packed with four or five hundred people. The minister’s sermon was about twenty minutes long consisting of three jokes, two or three illustrations, and an appeal to become a Christian and join the church. Then we were dismissed. My wife later commented that it probably didn’t take as long to prepare the sermon as it did to deliver it. She then asked, “Does it bother you that he can get by with that and pack a church and you spend thirty hours preparing a sermon and only to have a fraction of an audience that he has? I told her it certainly did. It bothered me the same way it grieved the Old Testament prophets as they saw false prophets preach lies, and the priests pervert the tabernacle worship, the same way it grieved Jesus when He saw His father’s house turned into a den of thieves, and the same way when Paul saw the idolatry on Mar’s Hill in Athens.


A. What Can the Righteous Do? v. 3.
What are the churches to do in response to Post-Modern thought and practice? Some say the answer is moral and political activism. They say we should get the right people put into the offices of our government and then into the churches and their training centers; thus, the founding of the Moral Majority. But a doctrine centered in man and his abilities will not stop the flood of Satan’s lies.

1. The Righteous Can Look To The Sovereignty of God
Our text points out in verse 4 that it is not so much as what we do, but “unto whom shall we look.” “The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven, His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.” This is a revelation of the one absolute sovereign God who is doing His will among the armies of heaven and earth. The sovereignty of God is the foundation of all truth and is never shaken when the foundations of society and religion are crumbling. II Timothy 2:19 says, “Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his. And, Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

David says the Lord is trying or testing the righteous. “For the righteous Lord loves righteousness: his countenance does behold the upright.” We do not change the Gospel to accommodate the culture, but we must confront the culture head to head in the truth of the Gospel as found in His Word. Let us not think that the Gospel has lost its power to convert men, even Post-Modern men. The God who restored to Nebuchadnezzar his mind, can restore a sound
mind to a Post-Modern zombie. Romans chapter one affirms that men cannot escape their consciences telling them there is a God who not only created them, but is also a moral judge who holds them accountable for their actions: Press the truth home to their consciences and leave the matter in God's hands to save or pass them by in their sin.

3. The Righteous Can Expect Increased Persecution From the Culture of Mankind.

V. 2.

The bow of the wicked will be bent and aimed at the heart of Biblical Christianity. Expect rejection, opposition, and hostility from family, friends, and foes as you seek to walk with the Lord in the light of His Word.

4. The Righteous Should Expect Their Faith To Be Tried By God. - v. 5.

The same God who separates the righteous from the wicked and reveals unto them precious truths, is the same God who will put them in the fiery furnace to test the validity of the truth. Not to inform Him, but to inform them of their faithfulness to His Word. Satan is alive and well and roaming about seeking whom he may devour. Where did Paul end up? As pastor of the First Baptist Church in Rome? No, as a prisoner under house arrest in Rome, chained to a personal guard, and later beheaded under Nero. Through many tribulations we must enter the final stage of the kingdom.

So how are we to respond to the times? Charles Spurgeon puts it like this:

“If all earthly things fail, and the very State falls to pieces, what can we do? We can suffer joyfully, hope cheerfully, wait patiently, pray earnestly, believe confidently, and triumph finally.” (Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, Vol. 1, P. 140, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI).

In the children's condensed version of the second half of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, he sets forth two characters known as Great Heart and Valiant-For-Truth. We read,

The road from the mountains went down through a thick forest. The pilgrims had not gone far when they came upon a man with a sword in his hands. He was tall and sinewy. Blood ran down his face and arms and down his hand onto his sword-blade.
Great-heart gripped his sword. “Who are you?” he called.
The man was breathing hard. “I am called Valiant-For-Truth”, he said. “I am a pilgrim to the holy city. As I came this way, three men stopped me on the road. They said their names were Wildhead, Inconsiderate, and Pragmatic. They told me I was to choose to join them, to turn back, or to die.”
“And you chose to fight?” said Great-heart.
“Indeed. We fought for hours. They just now ran off as they heard you coming. Though I bleed from their wounds, they bleed from many more that I gave them.”
Great-heart was beaming, “Now here is a fighting man!” He said. “Three against one!”
“Those odds are nothing to a man who has the truth on his side,” said Valiant-For-Truth. “As it is written, Even if a whole army surrounds me, I will not be afraid.”
“You have done well!” Said Great-heart. “You have resisted unto blood, fighting against evil. Now, come, let us wash your wounds.”
When this was done and they went on Great-heart walked with Valiant-For-Truth.

May God raise us a multitude from the tribe of Issachar to understand the times in which we live and stand for the truth of His Word.