Using Pagan And Non-Christian Philosophies To Justify Their Sins

Throughout the centuries, many Christians have wanted to justify their disobediences to the Biblical teachings and commands about many moral or ethical issues. Because they were not able to find unambiguous strong support in the Bible for their actions, they turned to pagan and other non-Christian ethical philosophies to defend their actions. Each of these philosophies contain some elements of truth which are not contrary to God's written Word. But these philosophies also contain many major unbiblical errors which greatly deceive their followers. Here are some of these philosophies:

1.   the natural law or natural justice philosophies of the pagan Greek Aristotle and the Stoics.
2.   the humanistic philosophies of the Renaissance in southern parts of Europe. [1]
3.   the casuistry of the Jesuits in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1600's.
4.   the rationalistic philosophies of the 1700's and 1800's.
5.   Kant's philosophy of idealism.
6.   the utilitarian philosophy of the 1700's, 1800's and 1900's.
7.   the pragmatist philosophy of the 1800's and 1900's.
8.   the empiricist philosophy of the 1800's and 1900's.
9.   the situational ethics philosophy of the 1960's onwards.
10.   the relativist philosophy.
11.   the secular humanist philosophy.
12.   the liberal philosophy of many Protestants.

The natural law or natural justice philosophy

This is the philosophy that the pagan "gods" or God implanted in the human race as a whole and as individuals an innate knowledge of right and wrong about ethical moral matters. [2] This knowledge of right and wrong can be worked out by *human reason*. [3] The founders of this philosophy were the ancient pagans Aristotle and the Stoics. [4] Refer to Chapter "   " for more details on the pagan natural law philosophies of Aristotle and the Stoics.

Those Christians who have tried to adapt the natural law philosophy to Christianity have used verses like Romans 1:24-27, Job 36:26-33 and Acts 14:17 on God speaking through creation, Romans 2:14-15 on God speaking through human conscience, and the many mentions of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs as proof of their philosophy. But note that God the Holy

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[1] The humanist movement during the Renaissance generally had more Biblical elements in Northern Europe than it did in Southern Europe.
[2] Walter Elwell (editor), "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology", Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, page 751.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

Spirit is not going to provide knowledge and wisdom in the natural realm and on our consciences which is contrary to anything He has inspired His Biblical authors to write (see Isaiah 8:20, John 10:35, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 4:6 and 14:37-38). God inspired His Biblical authors in all they wrote (see Matthew 5:17-18, Acts 24:14, 1 Corinthians 3:18-20, Galatians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 1:10-12 and 2 Peter 3:15-16). God is not a liar. He does not change His will except in some ways under His various covenants. He opposes those who add man-made rules or teachings to His Scriptures or who make their own man-made exceptions to His commands and teachings (see Matthew 15:1-9, 23:16-22 and Mark 7:1-13). God calls this the sins of adding or subtracting from His written Word (see Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, Proverbs 30:6 and Revelation 22:18-19).

According to this philosophy, a natural law is a rule based on sound logic and human reasoning which has good results.

One of the main problems with the natural law philosophy is that what seems to be based on sound logic and human reasoning and what appears to have good results in the eyes of one group of people is often different in the view of another group. Also what seems to be logical, reasonable and good in human eyes is often contrary to how God defines these three things. Proverbs 21:2 warns us: *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts."* Proverbs 16:2 declares: *"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits."*

In Proverbs 14:12, God emphasises that there are things which seem right and reasonable to humans but the results or end of these things is death: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* Proverbs 16:25 says the same.

Using the unbiblical natural law philosophy of Aristotle and the Stoics, many Christians invented rules about a number of moral matters which were contrary to the broad teachings and commands of the Bible.

Relevant New Testament Greek words

In the New Testament, there some usages of words which relate to being in agreement with God's original intentions as expressed through His natural creation. These words are:

a) the Greek adjective "phusikos" translated in Romans 1:26 and 27 as *"natural"* in the New King James Version and New American Standard Bible. The adjective "phusikos" means "produced by nature, inborn" [5] or "natural, in accordance with nature". [6] Romans 1:26-27 states: *" For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."*

b) the Greek adverb "phusikos" translated in Jude 10 as *"naturally"* (N.K.J.V. and N.A.S.B.). The adverb "phusikos" means "naturally, by instinct" [7] or "naturally, by natural instinct." [8]

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[5] Vine, page 426.
[6] Bauer, page 869.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Perschbacher, page 433.

c)   the Greek noun "phusis" translated in Romans 1:26, 2:14 and 1 Corinthians 11:14 as *"nature"* (N.K.J.V.). In these verses, "phusis" means "the nature of something as the result of its natural development or condition" [9] or "nature as the regular natural order." [10] Romans 2:14 uses the expression *"by nature"*. 1 Corinthians 11:14 says: ***"Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"***

God's will expressed through nature is never contrary to His Word

      It is true that various aspects of God's will are expressed through His natural creation (see Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1-4). One aspect of the Noahic Covenant involved God making a covenant with His creation (see Genesis 8:21-22 and 9:8-17). God's covenant with creation is also referred to in Jeremiah 33:20 and 25. But this does not mean that God's will expressed through His created natural world will ever be contrary to His revealed will in His written Word.

      If we attempt to interpret God's will solely through His natural creation, we leave ourselves open to the possibility of great error. This is because our own understanding and interpretation of His natural creation is very subjective. Without using the written Word of God as an objective standard by which we can test our interpretations of God's will as revealed in nature, we can easily fall into great error. Here are some examples:

a)   We can observe that in nature, all humans and animals die. From this, we can wrongly reason that it was God's original intention that all humans physically die.
b)   We can see in nature that, some animal fathers kill their children. From this, we can logically deduce that it is God's will that human fathers sometimes murder their living children.
c)   In nature, we see that animals only have sexual intercourse to produce offspring. Because of this, some ascetic Greek philosophers concluded that it is the so-called "gods'" will that married humans have sex only to produce children and never for pleasure.
d)   In nature, we observe that some male animals have sexual intercourse with many females of the same species during the same mating season. From this, we can wrongly conclude that it is God's will that human males have multiple sex partners while unmarried or married.

      All conclusions which we can reason or logically make from our studies of God's natural creation must be tested by written Word. Any conclusion which is contrary to God's written Word is a foolish idea which God opposes.

The High Church Anglican Richard Hooker's widespread influence

      The High Church Anglican theologian and preacher Richard Hooker (1554-1600 A.D.) was the main and earliest Protestant to spread the natural law philosophy of the pagan Aristotle and the Stoics in the Church. Hooker wrote his book "Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" to attack the emphasis of Evangelicals in the Anglican Church in the 1500's on the sole infallible

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[9] Louw and Nida, page 586.
[10] Bauer, page 869.

authority of the Scriptures. Hooker and other High Church Anglicans did not like the Evangelical Anglicans' rejection of unscriptural man-made church traditions and of so-called "natural laws of God" invented by theologians' human reasonings.

Whitgift, the High Church Archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual head of the Anglican Church and Queen Elizabeth I, the earthly head of the Anglican Church strongly supported Hooker's above-mentioned book. [11]

Elwell records, *"While Hooker held that Scripture contained what is necessary for salvation, still the law of nature was primary. As times change, specific laws (**including Scripture**) **can be changed**, though always in accordance with fundamental natural law. Thus the church cannot be held subject to the **letter of Scripture** or of tradition, it is free to **adjust** itself to its own historical context."* From this, we see that Hooker taught:

- that the commands of Scripture can be changed or adjusted to suit the *contemporary* situation.
- there is a *letter* of Scripture which does not have to be obeyed by believers.

These two unbiblical beliefs laid the foundation for much later compromising by many Anglican leaders and churchgoers about various Biblical moral, social and spiritual issues.

Hooker taught that a higher authority than Scripture and church traditions was *"natural law, which is implanted in people's minds by God and comes to full expression in the state."* [12] This belief laid the foundation for the attitude that Anglican kings and queens of England with the support of Parliament could make so-called "God-inspired laws" which were contrary to the Scriptures in certain ways.

The humanist philosophy of the Renaissance in Southern Europe

In especially the southern parts of Europe during the Renaissance period from 1350 to 1650 A.D., there was a massive revival of the beliefs, customs and practices of the ancient pagan Greeks and Romans. This resulted in a massive paganisation of the beliefs and practices of millions of so-called Christians in Europe at the time.

Especially in the 1300's and 1400's, there was a spread of pagan Greek and Roman attitudes to sex and modesty in Europe.

During the Renaissance period, generally speaking the humanist movement in Northern Europe was more Biblical and Christian than the humanist movement in southern Europe. This is because in the Renaissance period in northern parts of Europe, the humanist movement led by John Reuchlin, John Colet and Eramus was more interested in studying the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew and in the teachings and practices of their Christian heritage than was the humanist movement of Southern Europe which focused mainly on the classical pagan writings, philosophies and practices of ancient Rome and Greece. The northern European Renaissance humanist movement had some unbiblical aspects but was generally more Biblical than the southern Renaissance movement.

Also note that the modern humanist movement, begun by the French Deists Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778 A.D.) and Francois Voltaire (1694-1778 A.D.) and the American

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[11] Walter Elwell (Editor), "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology", Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, page 531.
[12] Ibid.

Deists Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790 A.D.) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826 A.D.), was far less Biblical and Christian than the Biblical and Christian than the humanist movement of the Renaissance in northern Europe. Rousseau, Voltaire, Paine, Franklin and Jefferson believed in the existence of God but opposed many or most of the main teachings of the Bible.

The rationalist philosophies of the 1700's and 1800's

In the 1700's and 1800's, one of the main philosophies followed in Europe, Britain and the U.S. was called rationalism. Rationalism refers to the philosophy that all truth and knowledge of right and wrong can be *logically deduced* by the *human mind*. Some rationalists believed in a personal God. Others believed in a "Divine Mind" type of God, others a "Nature-god" and yet others were agnostics and atheists.

The two main faults of the rationalists philosophy are:

1. our human minds are limited and cannot understand all things. For example, no human can fully understand the concept of infinity or its alternative that the universe has boundaries and there is "nothing" outside these boundaries. Psalm 139:1-6: *"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.* In Psalm 40:5, David says: *"Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts which are toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."*
2. many things which seems to be right to the logic of our human minds is wrong in God's eyes (see Proverbs 16:2 and 21:2).

In the 1700's and 1800's, many Europeans, Britons and Americans gave many logical reasons why it was right to have sex outside marriage and follow other unbiblical practices.

Kant's philosophy of idealism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German who taught philosophy at the University of Konigsberg from 1755 to 1804. The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology records the following about Kant: *"In 1784, he wrote an article asking the question, 'What is enlightenment?' He replied that enlightenment is man's emergence from immaturity. It is man learning to think for himself without relying on the authority of the Church, the Bible or the state to tell him what to do. Kant's philosophy was an attempt to reappraise human knowledge, ethics, aesthetics and religion in the light of this ideal."* [13] This is what is called the philosophy of idealism.

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[13] Elwell, page 599.

The same dictionary also said this of Kant: *"No other thinker has so profoundly influenced the course of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy and theology."* [14] Nearly all of the most popular non-Christian philosophies of the 1800's and 1900's built on some of Kant's errors. His errors were extremely popular with millions of non-Christians and nominal Christians among churchgoers and non-churchgoers, especially in the late 1700's and 1800's.

Kant believed that there are only two sources of human knowledge – our physical senses and human reason. [15] He taught that there was no such thing as supernatural revelation from God. [16] He believed that there is a god, but his god is different from the God spoken of in the Bible.[17]

Immanuel Kant also taught that Jesus Christ was just an enlightened moral teacher whose life expressed his teaching. [18] Kant also said that Christianity was a means of teaching ethics to the philosophically unsophisticated. [19] Kant rejected the idea that our ethics or morals should be based on the will of God. [20]

Kant's teaching on ethics was similar to the ancient pagan Stoic philosophers in the fact that he and they taught that when humans know what is right through their enlightened reason, it is their duty to do this right action. [21]

Also Kant and the Stoics taught that in cases where people do not know what is right, they should follow whatever course of action appears to their human reason to have the best consequences. [22] This is regardless of whether the means to achieve this is good or evil. [23] This latter view is a wicked ends-justifies-the-means philosophy, like that condemned by Paul in Romans 3:8.

The utilitarian philosophy of the 1700's, 1800's and 1900's

Utilitarianism is the philosophy that right and wrong is determined on the basis of whether an action in the judgment of humans results in more good than evil. Utilitarianism is an ends-justifies-the-means philosophy. This is because it teaches that it is right to sometimes use bad or evil means if the results of such actions are supposedly good for the majority of people. Utilitarianism had many supporters in Ancient Rome and had a revival in Britain in the late 1700's and 1800's inspired by the English utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73).

In relation to deciding if a proposed or current law is right or wrong, governments following this philosophy will judge if the law supposedly will result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid, pages 599-600.
[18] Ibid, page 600.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, page 599.
[21] Ibid, page 397.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

Many governments and individuals in Britain, Australia and elsewhere have followed this philosophy instead of Biblical morals. In the 1800's and 1900's, many English-speaking church leaders and churchgoers were deceived into adopting utilitarianism as God's approach to morals and ethics.

One of the means by which the unbiblical philosophy of utilitarianism became accepted among many in the Church in Britain in the early and mid 1900's was through the strong influence of Professor Henry Sidgwick, the Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge University. [24] Sidgwick (1873-1958) was utilitarianism's clearest spokesman. [25] He influenced thousands of Anglican ministers who trained at Cambridge.

The pragmatist philosophy of the 1800's and 1900's

Pragmatism is defined as the philosophy which says that truth can be found only by *testing* its *practical expressions* or *practical results* or its *workableness.*

The founders of the pragmatist philosophy were the three Americans Charles Pierce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology states that the pragmatist teachings of these three men *"became deeply entrenched in American universities, and affected many fields of inquiry – notably psychology, religion and education."* [26]

Charles Pierce's philosophy was similar to utilitarianism in that he emphasised analyzing the *practical consequences* of ideas and beliefs to determine whether they are true. [27]

William James argued that we cannot be certain about any of our beliefs. [28] He said all of our beliefs about what is true, false, right and wrong are hypothetical and never absolute and can only be based on currently observable facts. [29] James also said that all our ideas are based on human experience and can never originate from revelation from God. [30]

Dewey taught that our ethics or morals should be based on what social scientific studies supposedly prove will have the best practical consequences or results. [31] Dewey stated that when we face moral dilemmas or ethical conflicts, we must try to evaluate the situation on the basis of experience like a scientist does, consider the different choices of action and imagine their consequences. [32] Then we should choose the action with the predicted best consequences. Dewey taught that if we decide on the basis of any supposedly absolute moral standard which we have prejudged to be right, we will make irrational choices. [33]

Dewey regarded no truth or moral standard as being absolute. [34] He attacked the usage of education as a means of passing on moral or ethical values to children. [35] He taught that

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[24] A. Jonsen and S. Toulmin, "The Abuse of Casuistry", Uni of California Press, 1988, pages 279-281.

[25] Walter Elwell, "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology", Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, page 1131.

[26] Elwell, page 864.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid, page 865.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Kenneth Vaux (editor), "Joseph Fletcher: Memoir of an Ex-Radical", Westminster, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993, page 39.

[32] Ibid, page 403.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Elwell, page 865.

education could only ever be a means of inquiry in which people discovered what is true, false, right and wrong by a supposedly scientific process. [36]

The pragmatist approach has some value when applied to subjects like chemistry, physics, engineering, history, geography and so on. But when applied to ethics and morals, the ideas of Pierce, James and Dewey resulted in their followers foolishly concluding by so-called "scientific" studies that divorce, sex before marriage, homosexuality, abortion, soft pornography, lowering censorship standards on films and disobeying the Bible's teachings about modesty and nudity were good things.

The pragmatist philosophy is a stupid wicked philosophy because:

1. It is based on the evil assumption that the ends justifies the means. Regardless of how supposedly good are the practical consequences or results of an evil action, this never justifies using this evil means. In Romans 3:8, Paul warns: ***"And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come?' – as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just."***
2. Scientific method has its place in the natural sciences. But in deciding what is true about God and Jesus Christ and what is right and wrong, *scientific method is a pitiful instrument*. This is because scientific method is based on the reasonings of our limited human minds and the imperfect observations of our limited human physical senses.
3. Many things are workable or practical but are still evil. It may be practical to kill all people once they reach 65 years old to help the economy and to lower taxation. But it is still a disgusting evil.

The empiricist or experience philosophy of the 1700's, 1800's and 1900's

The philosophy of empiricism says that true knowledge and true science can only be obtained by our internal and external *experience* as humans through the realms of our *physical senses* and *minds*. The main advocate of this philosophy was David Hume (1711-1776).

Empiricism declares that there is no such thing as absolute revelation from God and that the human mind and conscience has no innate sense of right and wrong.

Many liberal Christians of the late 1800's and early 1900's tried to turn Christianity into a form of empiricism. Elwell records: *"Liberal theologians of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries applied the scientific method to religion, attempting to reconstruct the Christian faith in accordance with the "modern" findings of science. Thus, a proper Christian understanding of the world and its progress required the empirical method. This desire to harmonize the Christian faith with the empirical method of science is not merely a modern liberal phenomenon but also can be found in the eighteenth century natural theologies of conservative writers such as William Paley and Bishop Butler."*[37]

The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was the father of heretical liberal Protestant theology. He tried to remould Christianity in terms of the foolish wicked philosophies of empiricism and romanticism. Romanticism was a movement in

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Elwell, page 354.

philosophy, religion, art and literature in the late 1700's and early 1800's which stressed emotion, sense experiences, fantasy and imagination as being far more important than rational thought and logical thinking. [38] Romantic philosophers stated that reality is not found in human reasoning but through feelings, immediate experiences, spiritual illumination and listening to the inner voices of one's own heart. [39]

Schleiermacher attacked rationalists and Deists for turning religion into just knowledge and doctrines worked out by human reasoning and into morals expressed in actions. [40] He said they had ignored feelings and experiences, the primary foundations of true religion according to him. [41] But he not only attacked the heretical rationalists and Deists. He also attacked born-again Christians whose teachings were founded on the infallible Bible. [42]

Schleiermacher wrote: *"No external authority, whether it be Scripture…takes precedence over the immediate experience of believers."* Elwell states Schleiermacher's above attitude resulted in him teaching other unbiblical ideas and how he badly influenced many others in the Church: *"This contributed to a more critical approach to the Bible by questioning its inspiration and authority, and to a rejection of doctrines he believed unrelated to people's religious experience of redemption such as the virgin birth, the Trinity, and the return of Christ – tenets which implied a cognitive and thus a direct knowledge rather than immediate God-consciousness.*

These ideas gained wide acceptance in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher's influence was evident not only in the demise of Enlightenment deism in Europe, but also in the rise of theological liberalism in America." [43]

Schleiermacher helped to destroy the influence of the unbiblical movement of Deism. [44] But in its place, he began another unbiblical heretical movement.

It is important to experience God and His salvation. It is not good enough just knowing truths about God and Christ. But the empiricist philosophy elevates human experience into a type of "god" and does not treat the Bible as the infallible God-given authority in judging all our experiences.

The philosophy of empiricism with its focus on human experience made exorbitant claims for itself by suggesting it was some type of wonderfully objective and almost infallible method of finding truth. But the reality is the human physical senses are limited, they sometimes make mistakes and the human mind is limited. As a result, each human can interpret various experiences in different ways. Therefore experience itself is highly subjective and has only a limited value in determining truth. [45]

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[38] Elwell, page 959.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid, page 982.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Paul Enns, "The Moody Handbook of Theology", Moody Press, Chicago, 1989, page 550.

[43] Elwell, page 983.

[44] Proponents of rationistic deism were Lord Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland, Thomas Paine, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, Francois Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

[45] Logical positivism was a philosophy similar to empiricism and popular in the 1900's. its 19th century founder the Frenchman Auguste Comte claimed that the most perfect form of knowledge is a similar description of the experience of the physical senses. Logical positivism also puts too much faith in our limited human senses and finite human minds.

The liberal philosophy of many Protestants

In the late 1800's in Europe, Britain and the United States, the liberal movement began in the Protestant Churches. The liberal movement was also called *modernism* because one of its main features was according to the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology *"the desire to adapt religious ideas to modern culture and modes of thinking."* [46]

As a result of its paramount desire to adapt Christianity to *modern* ideas and culture or to make Christianity *contemporary*, the liberals in the Protestant Churches have followed, for example, the following unbiblical non-Christian philosophies, ideas and practices:

1. the philosophies of rationalism, idealism, pragmatism, humanism, utilitarianism, relativism, situational ethics and existentialism.
2. the theory of macro-evolution. It is true there are genetic mutations or microevolution within various species. But to suggest that living beings spontaneously generate out of non-living matter is an absurd myth and not science. Macroevolution also foolishly assumes that in past history God approved of some humans having sex with apes or monkeys until humans became a separate species. The theory of macroevolution is similar to the ancient theory of the pagan astronomer Ptolemy who "proved" the Sun revolves around the Earth. Ptolemy's "proofs" deceived millions of the best human intellects for centuries.
3. the practices of abortion, homosexuality, sex outside marriage, easy divorce and disobediences to the Bible's teachings about modesty and nudity.

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology records that two of the other main teachings of liberalism or modernism are: *"All beliefs must pass the tests of reason and experience"* and the Bible is supposedly *"neither supernatural nor an infallible record of divine revelation and thus does not possess absolute authority."* [47]

Final Point

As Christians, we must all turn from the wicked practice of following foolish pagan philosophies in determining what is true, false, right and wrong. God will hold us accountable if we do not.

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[46] Elwell, page 631.
[47] Ibid, pages 631-632.