

francis schaeffer how should we then live 3

Francis Schaeffer's seminal work, "How Should We Then Live?," remains a cornerstone for understanding the intersection of faith, culture, and philosophy in the modern era. Specifically, exploring the implications of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" delves into the critical historical periods and philosophical shifts that shaped Western civilization, leading Schaeffer to articulate a compelling call to action for Christians. This article will unpack the core arguments presented in the third section of his groundbreaking book, examining how Schaeffer critiques the prevailing intellectual currents and offers a robust apologetic for a Christian worldview. We will investigate the societal fragmentation, the rise of existentialism and the breakdown of unified meaning, and Schaeffer's proposed solutions for living a meaningful and impactful life in a post-Christian landscape.

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Understanding "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3": The Era of Meaninglessness

The third section of Francis Schaeffer's "How Should We Then Live?" powerfully confronts the trajectory of Western thought and culture, identifying a critical turning point characterized by a profound loss of unified meaning. Schaeffer argues that the intellectual foundations laid by earlier periods had, by this point, fractured into a pluralism of competing and often contradictory worldviews. This fragmentation, he contends, left individuals adrift in a sea of subjectivity, struggling to find a cohesive basis for truth, morality, and purpose. "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" is thus an exploration of a society grappling with the consequences of abandoning a divinely ordained, objective framework for understanding reality. Schaeffer's analysis is deeply historical, tracing the philosophical and cultural shifts that precipitated this crisis of meaning. He highlights how the rejection of God's absolute truth, a theme woven throughout the entire book, directly led to the anxieties and uncertainties of the modern age.

The Erosion of Unified Truth: From the Renaissance to Modernity

Schaeffer begins his critique in "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" by examining the gradual erosion of unified truth that began centuries earlier. While the Renaissance is often celebrated for its humanistic achievements, Schaeffer views it as a subtle but significant shift away from a God-centered worldview. The emphasis began to move from God as the ultimate source of truth and meaning to human reason and experience. This intellectual pivot, though initially subtle, laid the groundwork for later developments that would further decentralize truth. The Enlightenment, with its fervent embrace of human reason as the primary arbiter of knowledge, accelerated this process. Schaeffer points out that when reason is elevated to the ultimate authority, and God is either ignored or relegated to a private sphere, the very concept of objective, universal truth begins to crumble. The rise of scientific empiricism, while yielding significant advancements, also contributed to a worldview that increasingly excluded supernatural or metaphysical explanations. This created a vacuum, leaving a void where a cohesive understanding of reality once stood.

The subsequent historical periods saw this trend intensify. Schaeffer meticulously details how the philosophical currents of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as rationalism and empiricism, increasingly prioritized subjective experience and individual interpretation over revealed truth. This led to a significant disconnect between the intellectual elite and the broader cultural understanding of reality. The seeds sown by the Renaissance and nurtured by the Enlightenment ultimately blossomed into a worldview where truth became relative, fluid, and dependent on individual perception. This decentralization of truth, a core concern in "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," is presented as the root cause of many of the cultural and societal ills Schaeffer observed.

Existentialism and the Search for Subjective Meaning

A significant portion of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" is dedicated to analyzing the rise of existentialism and its profound impact on the search for meaning. Schaeffer argues that existentialist philosophy is a direct consequence of the preceding intellectual shifts. When objective truth and divine purpose are removed from the equation, individuals are left with the daunting task of creating their own meaning in an apparently meaningless universe. Philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, though diverse in their perspectives, shared a common thread: the emphasis on human freedom and responsibility in a world devoid of inherent purpose. Schaeffer highlights the inherent anxiety and despair that often accompanies this existential burden. If there is no preordained purpose, then life can feel arbitrary, and human existence can seem ultimately futile.

Schaeffer critiques existentialism not from a position of dismissal, but from a pastoral concern for the human condition it describes. He understands the philosophical appeal of creating one's own meaning, but he sees the ultimate inadequacy of such an approach. The subjective creation of meaning, divorced from an external, objective reality, is ultimately fragile and susceptible to collapse. Furthermore, Schaeffer argues that this subjective approach to meaning inevitably leads to a breakdown in shared values and a fragmentation of societal bonds. If each individual is solely responsible for constructing their own truth and purpose, then common ground becomes increasingly difficult to find. This contributes to the sense of alienation and isolation that Schaeffer

observes as prevalent in the modern era, a central theme of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3."

The emphasis on individual freedom, while seemingly liberating, can, in Schaeffer's view, lead to a paralysis of choice and a constant fear of making the "wrong" decision. Without a guiding framework, the sheer weight of self-creation can be overwhelming. Schaeffer's analysis of existentialism is therefore a critical examination of a philosophical response to the vacuum left by the rejection of God's objective truth.

The Breakdown of Morality and the Impact on Society

The fragmentation of truth and the rise of subjective meaning, as explored in "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," inevitably lead to a corresponding breakdown in objective morality. Schaeffer argues that when there is no absolute standard by which to measure right and wrong, morality becomes a matter of personal preference, societal consensus, or political expediency. This erosion of a shared moral compass, Schaeffer warns, has devastating consequences for society. Without a transcendent basis for ethical behavior, societal structures and institutions become vulnerable to relativism and moral decay.

Schaeffer connects the philosophical shifts to tangible societal impacts. He observes a growing disconnect between what is declared as "good" or "right" in public discourse and any underlying, consistent ethical principle. This can manifest in various ways, including the normalization of previously unacceptable behaviors, the redefinition of fundamental concepts like marriage and family, and a general decline in civic virtue. The inability to appeal to an objective standard of morality leaves societies susceptible to manipulation and the imposition of arbitrary rules by those in power. The search for meaning, when divorced from God, also impacts how individuals interact with each other. Compassion and genuine concern for the "other" can be undermined when the ultimate value of each human life is not grounded in God's image.

Furthermore, Schaeffer contends that this moral relativism creates an environment where justice becomes a hollow concept. Without an objective standard of justice, what is considered just can change with the prevailing winds of public opinion or political power. This leads to a society where the strong can exploit the weak with little recourse to a higher moral authority. The insights within "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" are therefore not merely abstract philosophical discussions but are presented as urgent observations about the practical consequences of abandoning a biblical worldview.

Schaeffer's Response: The Necessity of God's Revelation

In the face of this perceived societal and philosophical crisis, "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" presents a robust apologetic for the necessity of God's revelation as the only viable foundation for truth, meaning, and morality. Schaeffer's central argument is that humanity's inherent longing for purpose and order cannot be satisfied by humanistic or existentialist constructs.

These frameworks, he argues, ultimately lead to despair and a dead end. Instead, Schaeffer posits that the Christian faith, with its declaration of a personal, transcendent God who has revealed Himself through Scripture, offers the only true and lasting answers to life's most profound questions.

Schaeffer emphasizes the intellectual coherence and comprehensiveness of the Christian worldview. Unlike relativistic or subjective systems, Christianity offers an objective framework that accounts for the totality of reality – from the existence of the universe to the nature of human beings, the problem of sin, and the promise of redemption. He argues that the Bible is not merely a collection of ancient stories or moral teachings, but the inspired, infallible Word of God, providing the ultimate authoritative source for all knowledge and understanding. This concept of divine revelation is central to Schaeffer's response, offering a stable and reliable anchor in a sea of uncertainty. "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" calls for a return to this foundational truth.

Schaeffer's apologetic approach is characterized by its engagement with contemporary thought. He does not shy away from addressing the intellectual challenges posed by secularism, science, and philosophy. Instead, he seeks to demonstrate how the Christian faith provides rational and satisfying answers to these challenges. He argues that by rejecting God's revelation, humanity has effectively blinded itself to the truth, leading to the fragmented and meaningless existence he diagnoses.

The Bible as Authoritative Truth

Central to Schaeffer's rebuttal to the prevailing intellectual currents in "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" is his unwavering conviction in the Bible as the authoritative truth of God. He asserts that without the objective revelation found in Scripture, humanity is left to construct its own flawed and ultimately insufficient systems of truth. Schaeffer contends that the Bible provides not only spiritual guidance but also a coherent framework for understanding science, history, ethics, and every aspect of human existence. He argues that the Bible's claims are historically verifiable and that its internal consistency testifies to its divine origin.

Schaeffer's emphasis on biblical authority is not a call to blind faith, but rather a challenge to engage with the biblical narrative rationally and critically. He believes that when examined objectively, the claims of Christianity stand up to scrutiny and offer a more complete and satisfying explanation of reality than any secular worldview. This conviction underpins his entire project in "How Should We Then Live?" and particularly in its third section, where he confronts the consequences of abandoning such an authoritative source. He argues that accepting the Bible as God's Word means accepting its pronouncements on truth and morality as definitive, providing a much-needed anchor for both individual lives and society as a whole.

The Incarnation as the Basis for Meaning

Schaeffer further elaborates on the unique contribution of Christianity to the search for meaning by highlighting the significance of the Incarnation – the concept of God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. He argues that this event, more than any philosophical concept, provides a solid foundation for objective meaning and value. In "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," Schaeffer posits that Jesus Christ, as both fully God and fully man, embodies the ultimate synthesis of the divine and

the human, and the spiritual and the material. This means that true meaning is not something to be invented but is found in relationship with a personal God who has entered human history.

The Incarnation, for Schaeffer, validates the entire human experience. It signifies that God cares about the world and about humanity to such an extent that He entered into it. This gives inherent dignity and value to every human life, as each person is created in the image of this God-Man. Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a pivotal event Schaeffer always emphasizes, provides the ultimate confirmation of God's power over death and the promise of eternal life. This offer of redemption and renewed relationship with God is what truly resolves the existential angst and provides a meaningful framework for living. Without the Incarnation and the resurrection, Schaeffer argues, the Christian message would be incomplete, and the search for ultimate meaning would remain unresolved.

Living Authentically in a Fragmented World: Practical Implications

In the concluding sections of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," Schaeffer transitions from diagnosis to prescription, offering practical guidance for Christians seeking to live authentically and impactfully in a fragmented and increasingly secularized world. He argues that the Christian faith is not merely an abstract belief system but a transformative way of life that should permeate every aspect of an individual's existence. The challenge, for Schaeffer, is to embody this truth in a way that is both winsome and counter-cultural, demonstrating the relevance and superiority of a biblical worldview.

Schaeffer's advice is rooted in the conviction that Christians are called to be distinct. This distinctiveness is not about isolation but about embodying the principles of God's Word in tangible ways. He advocates for a life characterized by intellectual engagement, cultural discernment, and a deep commitment to truth and love. The goal is not to retreat from the world but to engage with it in a way that reflects the glory of God and offers a compelling alternative to the prevailing philosophies and lifestyles. "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" encourages a life lived with purpose and conviction.

The Christian's Role in Culture

Schaeffer emphasizes that Christians are not meant to withdraw from culture but to engage with it as salt and light. In "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," he challenges believers to be informed participants in the intellectual and artistic spheres, offering a distinct Christian perspective. This engagement involves discerning the underlying philosophical assumptions of various cultural expressions and responding with truth and grace. Schaeffer advocates for a rigorous intellectual engagement with art, philosophy, and politics, seeking to understand their messages and to offer a biblical critique where necessary.

He believes that Christians have a responsibility to engage with culture in a way that demonstrates the relevance and superiority of the Christian worldview. This means not simply reacting against

prevailing trends but offering a positive and compelling alternative. Schaeffer encouraged Christians to be creative and innovative, to produce art, literature, and ideas that are grounded in biblical truth and reflect God's beauty and order. The goal is to influence culture by presenting a consistent, believable Christian witness. This engagement is not about compromising truth for the sake of popularity, but about presenting truth in a way that is understandable and persuasive to a modern audience. The insights from "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" serve as a guide for this cultural engagement.

Living with Truth and Love

Schaeffer's practical counsel for living in a fragmented world, as detailed in "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3," centers on the inseparable nature of truth and love. He argues that a purely intellectual or propositional faith, divorced from genuine love and compassion, is incomplete and ultimately ineffective. Conversely, a love that is not grounded in truth can become sentimentalism or even a capitulation to error. Schaeffer calls for Christians to embody both truth and love in their interactions with the world.

This means speaking the truth in love, as the Apostle Paul exhorts. It involves being unashamed of the gospel message while simultaneously demonstrating genuine care and concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of others. Schaeffer encourages believers to live lives of integrity, where their actions consistently reflect their beliefs. This includes ethical conduct in personal and professional life, as well as a commitment to justice and mercy. By living out the truth of the gospel with genuine love, Christians can offer a powerful testimony to the transformative power of God in a world desperately searching for meaning and hope. The practical implications of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" empower believers to be agents of change.

Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of "How Should We Then Live 3"

The third section of Francis Schaeffer's "How Should We Then Live?" continues to resonate powerfully with contemporary readers, offering a profound diagnosis of cultural fragmentation and a compelling call to a biblical worldview. Schaeffer's exploration of the historical trajectory that led to an era of meaninglessness, characterized by the erosion of unified truth and the rise of existentialism, remains remarkably prescient. His analysis highlights how the abandonment of God's objective revelation has led to a crisis of meaning, morality, and purpose in Western society. The insights provided within "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" serve as a vital resource for understanding the challenges of our time and for articulating a robust Christian apologetic.

Schaeffer's emphasis on the Bible as authoritative truth and the Incarnation as the ultimate source of meaning provides a solid foundation for navigating a relativistic culture. His call for Christians to engage with culture with both truth and love offers a practical framework for living authentically and influencing the world for the better. The enduring relevance of "Francis Schaeffer How Should We Then Live 3" lies in its ability to equip believers with the intellectual tools and the spiritual conviction necessary to live out their faith with integrity and impact in a complex and often challenging world. The book, and particularly this section, remains a vital call to live a life grounded

in the absolute truths of God.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central thesis of Francis Schaeffer's 'How Should We Then Live?' Part 3?

Part 3 of 'How Should We Then Live?' argues that the erosion of a shared biblical worldview in Western society has led to a breakdown in culture, leading to increasing relativism, despair, and the rise of totalitarianism.

What historical periods or movements are primarily discussed in Part 3 of Schaeffer's work?

Part 3 focuses heavily on the impact of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and existentialism, tracing how these movements, in Schaeffer's view, departed from biblical foundations and contributed to the cultural decline.

How does Schaeffer connect the loss of a "true" God to societal problems in Part 3?

Schaeffer posits that when humanity rejects God's objective truth, it inevitably creates its own subjective realities, leading to moral relativism, the dehumanization of individuals, and ultimately, the state filling the vacuum with its own arbitrary authority.

What specific cultural consequences does Schaeffer highlight in Part 3 as a result of this worldview shift?

He points to the fragmentation of knowledge, the rise of subjective art and philosophy, the decline of traditional morality, and the increasing acceptance of totalitarian political systems as direct consequences of abandoning God-given absolutes.

What role does Schaeffer assign to art and philosophy in demonstrating the breakdown of Western culture in Part 3?

Schaeffer uses examples from art, literature, and philosophy to illustrate the progression from a God-centered worldview to one increasingly focused on man's subjective experience, highlighting how this shift reflects and amplifies the cultural decay.

What is Schaeffer's proposed solution or "then live" aspect for Christians in light of the issues raised in Part 3?

Schaeffer advocates for Christians to engage in apologetics, to live out a consistent biblical worldview in all areas of life, and to offer a robust, intellectually satisfying alternative to the

prevailing secular humanism, thus influencing culture positively.

How does Schaeffer address the concept of freedom in Part 3 and its potential for perversion?

He argues that true freedom is found in God's order and truth. When this foundation is removed, freedom devolves into license and ultimately leads to chaos, which then necessitates oppressive control to maintain order.

What is the significance of the title 'How Should We Then Live?' in the context of Part 3?

The title signifies the practical application of the theological and philosophical analysis. Having identified the problems arising from a non-Christian worldview, Part 3 calls for a distinct way of living for those who hold to a biblical perspective.

What is the overall tone or sentiment of Part 3 of Schaeffer's 'How Should We Then Live?'

The tone of Part 3 is largely cautionary and critical, as Schaeffer diagnoses what he perceives as the terminal illness of Western culture due to its abandonment of a biblical foundation. However, it also carries a sense of urgency and a call to faithful action.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live?* and their descriptions:

1. *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis. This classic work explores the dangers of reducing humanity to mere biological and psychological mechanisms, arguing for the necessity of objective moral values. Lewis posits that a denial of the Tao (natural law) will inevitably lead to a society controlled by the "conditioners." It's a foundational text for understanding the erosion of transcendentals in modern thought, a theme Schaeffer deeply engaged with.
2. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Lewis systematically lays out the core tenets of Christian belief in a clear and accessible manner, starting from common ground and moving to specific doctrines. He addresses fundamental questions about morality, God, and the nature of Christ. This book provides a robust apologetic framework that aligns with Schaeffer's emphasis on reason and the intelligibility of the Christian worldview.
3. *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins presents a forceful critique of religious belief, arguing that God is a delusion and that faith is a detriment to humanity. He advocates for atheism based on scientific reasoning and appeals to naturalism. This book represents a modern manifestation of the secular, materialistic worldview that Schaeffer spent his career confronting and seeking to answer.
4. *Reason in the Balance: The Case for Christianity in a World Without Humility* by Sir John

Templeton. Templeton advocates for a return to faith and spiritual wisdom, arguing that true progress and well-being are hindered by a purely materialistic outlook. He champions the integration of scientific discovery with spiritual understanding, encouraging a more holistic approach to life. This book echoes Schaeffer's call to integrate faith and reason in all areas of life.

5. *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding Our Religious and Political World* by R.C. Sproul. Sproul examines the profound impact of differing philosophical and theological ideas on Western civilization. He traces the lineage of concepts from the Enlightenment to contemporary thought, demonstrating how these ideas shape our understanding of truth, morality, and society. This work provides a historical and theological perspective that parallels Schaeffer's own analysis of cultural trends.

6. *Culture and Identity: Meaning in the Postmodern Age* by various authors. This collection of essays explores the fragmentation of identity and the search for meaning in a postmodern world characterized by relativism and the erosion of grand narratives. Contributors grapple with how individuals construct their sense of self amidst diverse influences and shifting cultural landscapes. The book addresses the very cultural anxieties that Schaeffer sought to illuminate and provide an answer to through a Christian lens.

7. *After God: The End of Religion* by David Bentley Hart. Hart offers a provocative and insightful critique of both secularism and contemporary religious practice, arguing that many forms of religiosity have lost their authentic spiritual core. He explores the implications of God's perceived absence in modern life and the challenges of finding meaning in a post-Christian era. This book engages with the "death of God" phenomenon that Schaeffer so keenly observed.

8. *The Rise of the Medieval World, 500-1300 A.D.* by Norman F. Cantor. Cantor provides a comprehensive history of the medieval period, detailing its societal structures, intellectual developments, and artistic achievements. He highlights the pervasive influence of Christianity on shaping Western civilization during this era. This book offers a historical backdrop to the development of a unified worldview that Schaeffer contrasts with the fragmented modern one.

9. *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink. Pink expounds on the biblical doctrine of God's absolute control over all things, arguing for the supremacy of His will in creation, providence, and salvation. He meticulously examines scriptural passages to establish this theological cornerstone. This book delves into a foundational aspect of the Christian worldview that underpins Schaeffer's understanding of God's reality and its implications for human life.

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