

How Your Theology Is Your Worldview Is Your Life

SATURDAY, November 22, 2025 at 8:00am CT

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

How Your Theology is Your Worldview is Your Life. That is the topic we'll discuss today right here on The Christian Worldview radio program, where the mission is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I'm David Wheaton, the host. The Christian Worldview is a nonprofit, listener-supported radio ministry. You can connect with us by visiting our website, TheChristianWorldview.org, and the rest of our contact information will be given throughout today's program. As always, thank you for your notes of encouragement, financial support, and lifting us up in prayer.

Now, just briefly before we get to this week's program, if you're a Christian Worldview partner, you should have the November issue of The Christian Worldview Journal by now, or it will be coming shortly. The theme is giving thanks in light of Thanksgiving this coming week. So here's a recommendation for your family time together. Choose one of the journal articles on giving thanks, pass it around the room to read out loud, and then ask each person to say something they're thankful to God for in about 30 to 60 seconds.

Also, we are going to release the Thanksgiving weekend program by Wednesday of this coming week, which is on the Pilgrims' beliefs and the founding of America. So you may want to include listening to all or part of that during your family time as well. We encourage you to make Thanksgiving meaningful, way beyond food and football. Also, the December issue of the journal will be sent to everyone on our mailing list, not just Christian Worldview partners. So if you've never seen or received the journal, go to TheChristianWorldview.org and enter your mailing address, or just call us toll-free 888-646-2233. And while you're at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org, you can browse lots of new resources for Christmas.

All right, now to the preview for How Your Theology is Your Worldview is Your Life. The dictionary defines theology as the study of God and religious belief. It may sound intellectual and academic, but in reality, everyone has beliefs about God and religion. The real question is whether those beliefs accurately represent God based on the standard, His inspired Word. Every few years, Ligonier Ministries conducts the State of Theology survey, as they put it, "to take America's theological temperature, revealing what people actually believe, both outside and inside the church. Our goal," they say, "is to diagnose prominent errors and to prescribe the cure, the clear teaching of sound doctrine." The State of Theology survey contains 35 statements that over 3,000 Americans from all walks of life answer. We have it linked at TheChristianWorldview.org, if you'd like to take it for yourself.

Dr. Stephen Nichols, chief academic officer at Ligonier Ministries and president of Reformation Bible College, joins us today to discuss some of the key findings of the survey with regard to the evangelical church and the general public. Because the real point of theology is not just to study God but to know, love, and worship Him. Let's get to the first segment of the interview with Dr. Stephen Nichols.

Steve, it's so good to have you back on The Christian Worldview radio program. Our topic of the day is How Your Theology is Your Worldview is Your Life. I want to start out with a quote from Dr. R.C. Sproul, who is the founder of Ligonier Ministries, who you have been with for many, many years. He said that everyone is a theologian. The question is whether you're a good theologian or a poor one. Steve, what did R.C. mean by that particular statement? And what does the State of Theology survey that we're going to talk about today aim to do?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

Let's just start with the first part. Everyone's a theologian. Why did he say that? It's exactly what you said. Theology is worldview, and that is life. Sadly, I think there's this sense in the church that theology is for the academy. These are sophisticated, must-speak-in-Latin theologians who have masters, doctorates, and the laity. They're just sort of Christians who do Christian living. The reality is, theology means the study of God, our knowledge of God. And so, every Christian, every person rather, has a view of God, a knowledge of God. And what R.C. was after, I think his whole life, David was focused on this, was helping people be better theologians. And you're a better theologian, of course, by knowing God's Word, studying God's Word, as Paul encourages us, thinking about God's Word, and putting together these biblical teachings in a systematic way. That's what theology is.

As we jump into the survey here, we'll see that even some who, sadly, may label themselves or identify as evangelicals aren't espousing a good theology on really essential doctrines. We as Ligonier, we write the statements, and then Lifeway Research, they put the poll into the field, they gather all the demographics, they collate the data, and then we're able to put all of that onto the stateoftheology.com website. Who are these 3,000 people? Well, first of all, just to point out, most of these Gallup polls, the other political polls we hear about all the time, their sample size is somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 people mostly. So, to have 3,000 is a very large sample size. And who are they? Well, they're Americans. Then you can go into the demographics to see the specifics of who they are.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Yes, there are all adults surveyed and there's evangelicals, different beliefs. So it's a wide swath of who Americans are. There's 35 statements made in this survey. There's five choices of response, and when someone takes it, they can either say strongly agree, somewhat agree, don't know, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement being made, 35 of them.

As you mentioned, Steve, we have them linked at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org, where listeners can go to find a link directly to the website where this survey is. I think this is a very interesting survey, partly because it's interesting to know what people are thinking in our country, particularly evangelicals who are affiliated with the Church. But it's also interesting, for our purposes, just to talk about some of these really important theological statements, because I think for those listening today, me included, it deepens your understanding of who God is and His will and His ways. And so, as you mentioned in your first answer, theology is important. It's a study of God, who He is. There's nothing more really important than that, than understanding who God is. So, that's why we're so looking forward to talking to you today.

Now, a summary finding from the survey, and this was put out by you all, said that the responses of evangelicals in the 2025 State of Theology survey reveal that the true character of God as displayed in Scripture is either not being taught in many evangelical churches or not understood by individual evangelicals. For example, the survey shows that many evangelicals hold theologically erroneous beliefs about the nature of God and the sinfulness of man, two critically important areas of doctrine that lay the foundation for all other theological beliefs, the nature of God and the sinfulness of man. And then one more sentence here, specifically, 64% of evangelicals believe that everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God. That's 64%. Wow. And 53% affirm that everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.

Before we get into some of the specific statements, why are these two overarching issues, the nature of God and the sinfulness of man, so foundational to understand for the Christian and particularly for the gospel message?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

They're foundational propositions for the gospel. When we're talking about evangelicals in this survey, it's by one of two ways. It's by their affiliation, so they can identify as evangelical. Or it's also by beliefs. And that's looking at statements 31, or 32 rather, to 35. We did not write those. Those were supplied by the National Association of Evangelicals as sort of an agreed upon litmus test. If you can hold these views, that's what it means to be an evangelical. So, we're talking about people who identify as evangelicals who have an unbiblical view of God and humanity as sinful. And the problem here is, in the word evangelical is the word evangel, which, as you know, David, means the gospel. And so, here you have evangelicals who aren't believing in two key foundational propositions for the gospel.

R.C. used to say, "You have three propositions here. God is holy, we are sinful, and we need a substitute." Now, of course, we need to expand on those, especially that third one. But in order to understand what Christ is doing on the cross, and to catch the full meaning of even why Christ is on the cross, we need to come to grips with our sinfulness. So, when you have evangelicals denying original sin, denying that we are not simply sinners because of our sinning, but we are sinners because we are at the root of our being sinful. And as Paul describes us, children of wrath in Ephesians 2, and Romans describes us as the enemies of God. And so we have to see ourself as sinful. We have to see God as holy. And now we look to Christ for mercy.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Dr. Stephen Nichols is our guest today here on The Christian Worldview radio program. We're talking about the latest State of Theology survey done by Ligonier Ministries. Dr. Stephen Nichols is the chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, as well as the president of Reformation Bible College.

Okay, let's jump into some of these statements. I'm not necessarily doing them in order. We're not going to get to all of them. We're going to do about five or six that I found interesting. Statement number 6. So here's a statement that respondents had to respond to. "God loves all people the same way." "God loves all people

the same way." And so, those taking the survey had a choice of strongly agree, somewhat agree, don't know, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. So we're going to lump, for the purposes of our conversation, those who strongly agree and somewhat agree into the agree category, and those who somewhat disagree and strongly disagree into the disagree category. And then the comment on this one was from the survey, perhaps most surprising is the response of evangelicals to the statement, "God loves all people the same way," with 94% in agreement. Most evangelicals answered this question incorrectly from a biblical standpoint than the general U.S. adult population, in which 83% agreed with the statement. In other words, evangelicals got this more wrong than the general U.S. population.

So, Steve, is this a misunderstanding of the question by evangelicals? And I think this can be a confusing issue that God loves everyone the same way. How does Scripture describe God's love for people? Is it different depending on the person.

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

The result here is staggering. So, it does reflect an inability to see why this is a problem. First of all, you can't find chapter and verse that says God loves everybody the same way. You find texts where you have the rain falls on the just and the unjust. And of course, rain in an agrarian culture, that's a good thing. You have texts like Acts 17 or Acts 14, where Paul is with pagans at Lystra and at Athens and speaking of God's goodness to them by giving them food and pleasure that's pleasing to them and satisfying to their souls.

So, we find texts that speak of God's common, benevolent goodness, kindness, love, or even we would say grace. But we also then have to dig a little deeper to see that there's a special love that God has for His covenantal people. And so, we see texts like Deuteronomy 7 and followed up again in Deuteronomy 10, where we're told God has all of the nations to choose, yet He sets His love on Israel. And we bump into a text that evangelicals don't like. It's in Malachi 1. Paul says it again in Romans. "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." And even in the beginning of Romans, there's a wonderful phrase there where Paul's describing who the Romans really are, the Roman believers. And he calls them loved by God.

Actually, David, I think the better way to look at this is God's truly special love for His beloved son. And so, God loves Jesus in a unique way. And then as we trust in Christ, as we put our faith in Christ, as we come into union with Christ, we become recipients of that same love. As R.C., he liked to say, we wear Christ's robe of righteousness, right? And as we wear Christ's righteous robes, we share in this amazing love for us from the Father that is not for all of humanity.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Very well stated. Another statement that evangelicals really surprisingly got wrong in this survey was statement number 3. Here's the statement. "God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam." So 47, nearly half of evangelicals agreed with that statement that God accepts the worship of all religions. 45% disagree.

Now, to follow up that statement, one more toward the end of the survey, I think it was statement number 35, "Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation." 100% positively agreed with that particular statement. It's absolutely correct.

So, why the disconnect here if God accepts the worship of all religions, even outside Christianity, and yet only those who trust alone in Christ Jesus as their Savior receive God's free gift of salvation, how can that be so contradictory to each other for evangelicals?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

I think it shows a lack of teaching and a lack of understanding. But I think it also is just reflective of the American culture. Sometimes American evangelicals take more on the American flavor than the evangelical flavor in their identity. We live in a world that's pluralist. We live in a world that celebrates the virtue of tolerance. We live in a world where we also have, as some sociologists will say, privatized religion. Like, your religious belief is good for you and my religious belief is good for me. So, when we hear all these things, we begin to think that this is a little harsh, this view that we call exclusivism, that there is salvation and no other name than Jesus Christ. Or Jesus' very countercultural statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life." And on top of that, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." I mean, that's an incredible truth statement. And so, I think evangelicals look at all these things and they think, "Well, maybe God's big enough to accept these other religions. And maybe He sees them as sincere, and they just didn't know Christ, so God's able to accept them."

On the one hand, I think they can believe that you need Christ, but then turn around and in the same survey say, "Yeah, maybe there's a wideness in God's grace and mercy that is beyond these particular beliefs, and who knows, all these people may very well be in heaven." Of course, that's the absolute worst thing we could do, and that's the worst thing we could think.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

How Your Theology is Your Worldview is Your Life. That's our topic for today. And Dr. Stephen Nichols, the president of Reformation Bible College and the chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, who did this State of Theology survey, is our guest. After this short break, to tell you about some ministry resources, I'll ask Steve about the following statements from the survey. "The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth before a person has faith in Jesus Christ." And "God chose the people He would save before He created the world." Well, that should be interesting. So stay tuned. I'm David Wheaton, and you are listening to The Christian Worldview radio program.

Manger in Danger Offer:

"We didn't want our kids doing all these secular games like Elf on the Shelf. We really wanted to put Christ front and center at Christmas. And they actually engineered a wooden manger that's small enough to hide. Then I wrote a family devotional with 25 devotions for every day in December leading up to Christmas, including Christmas Day, that you can do in about seven minutes. And the devotions are just loaded with the deity of Christ and the gospel."

That was Pastor Grant Castleberry describing Manger in Danger, a new daily devotional and game for families with children aged 4 to 12. Manger in Danger retails for \$40 plus shipping. We're offering it for a donation of \$30 or more to The Christian Worldview. To order, go to TheChristianWorldview.org , call 888-646-2233, or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

The Christian Worldview Journal

Thanksgiving is the focus of the November issue of The Christian Worldview Journal. My column is on giving thanks to God, even in difficult circumstances. Managing Editor Soeren Kern writes about gratitude and includes impactful quotes from notable Christians. Soeren also analyzes the recent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and how it won't lead to lasting peace.

The Christian Worldview Journal is a monthly 12-page full-color print publication designed to sharpen your biblical worldview on current events and issues of the faith. It also includes a resource catalog and ministry updates. The journal is mailed to Christian Worldview partners as a thank you for their support of this radio ministry. To become a Christian Worldview partner or order an individual issue of the journal, go to TheChristianWorldview.org , or call 888-646-2233, or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Our topic today is How Your Theology is Your Worldview is Your Life, in light of the most recent State of Theology survey, and Dr. Stephen Nichols, president of Reformation Bible College and chief academic officer at Ligonier Ministries, is our guest.

Now, these next couple statements, Steve, were ones that I chose because I think they help sharpen our own theology and worldview. I'm not surprised at a bit of the confusion in the answer at these because these have been sort of debated over the centuries. Statement number 10, here it is. "The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth or new life before a person has faith in Jesus Christ." 60% of evangelicals agree with that, 10% not sure, 30% disagree with that. So, lots of division on that particular topic that the Holy Spirit basically regenerates a person before that person actually has the faith to believe. I'm sure people listening have fallen one side or the other on that one, but I'd like you to explain what Scripture teaches about the process and order of God justifying the unbeliever.

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

So, we start with who we are and how Scripture defines us and describes us. We're not defined as sick and in need of medicine. The overarching metaphor, especially of Paul, is that we are dead in our trespasses and sins. And Paul is actually picking up on a beautiful Old Testament picture, going back to Ezekiel's Valley of the Dry Bones. What a dramatic moment. And you have the breath of God, the ruach of God is the Hebrew word. So the Spirit is the word. The Spirit of God hovers over those bones. They connect. They take on sinew and muscles and tendons and ligaments, and they come to life. So, Paul says we are dead in our trespasses and sins. And you have to ask yourself, "What can a dead person do?" And the answer is nothing. And so, we must be brought to life, which is what regeneration means, regenerated, in order to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And so, regeneration precedes faith.

Now, you see this with Jesus, with Nicodemus in John 3, who says, "You must be born again." And Nicodemus is a little slow here on the uptake of what that means. And Jesus is trying to explain it to him. But I would suggest you sit down with Titus 3:5-7, and you see the order there that Paul gives for our salvation. And we have the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit preceding the work of Christ and being justified by grace through our faith in Christ. So, just sit with Titus 3:5-7 and just think about what Paul teaches about who we are in Adam as dead in our sins, and you'll see why this is the conclusion that regeneration precedes faith.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Very well said. And I'm going to follow that particular question up with another one that's a little bit related to another statement. This is statement number 19. Again, a wide division amongst evangelicals coming on one side or the other, agree or disagree on this one. The statement is this. "God chose the people He would save before He created the world." 41% of evangelicals agree, 45% disagree. "God chose the people He would save before He created the world." And it's related to the last question in a way because, well, who's doing the one that's saving? Is it God's work or our work? Is it we have to have the faith? Or how does that work together? So, talk about the basis for that particular statement and why it is actually true what the Bible teaches that God actually chose those He would save before even the creation of the world.

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

The place to go here is Ephesians 1, and it is a great place to just camp out and see what we're learning here. The first thing we see is that the action here is all on the divine side. A God is doing the work here. We are the recipients. And we are specifically told here that we are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. So, again, this is Scripture's teaching of election. And there's a lot of debate about election. And you'll hear people even say, "Well, I'm not sure I believe in election." It is a biblical word. It is a biblical doctrine. So, we have to have some view of election. But what we're taught, again, by Paul is that this does indeed precede our birth. It precedes the creation of the world, which means then that God's election of us is outside of us.

Again, you go back to God's election of Israel in Deuteronomy 7. God actually makes the point that Israel is the least of the nations. He could have chosen Egypt or Babylon or Persia, but He chose Israel. And so, we're learning something there that our election, and the word theologians use, is unconditional. And seeing that it's before the foundation of the world, before you or I have the opportunity to do anything or choose, we have been unconditionally elected by God's love.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

The obvious follow-up question to this is one that I've heard John MacArthur get asked many times about God's election yet man's responsibility if it's all of God in salvation. So, Jesus said to repent and believe in the gospel, where there's something for man to do, and where there must be some meaningful choice that God holds us accountable for, whether we receive by faith the gift of salvation or we reject it. So, how does God's election jibe with our responsibility to repent and believe in the gospel?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

I think, first of all, Jesus, the biblical authors, they don't actually present it as a choice, if you look at the text. It's actually a command. So, we are all commanded to repent and trust. And so, we sort of have this idea that it's offered to us and it's sort of up to us. But I don't think, first of all, you're going to find it presented that way biblically. So, then, how can, on the one hand, there be election and yet we are all commanded to trust in Christ? And we, as Christians, are commanded to proclaim the gospel freely. We should never make some discrimination between the elect and the non-elect. We don't know what their state is.

And so, I think it just emphasizes, again, underscores that God's plan for redemption is for humanity, that God is a merciful God, gracious God, has provided this means of salvation. And yet at the same time, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." Paul wrestles with this in Romans 9, and he's trying to get the Roman Christians to wrestle with this. And then he says, "The clay can't turn around and say to the potter, 'Why have you made me this way?'" So, I think we reached a point where we need to understand the doctrine of election, affirm it, but we won't fathom its depths.

Meanwhile, we must proclaim the gospel urgently and faithfully. Obviously, we're talking here about being a Calvinist. We can say this as a Calvinist, "Everyone who puts their trust in Christ will be saved." That's a true statement. Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved and can rest in that.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

I've heard one person say one time, these are two truths like train tracks. They're going parallel and they end up in the same place. They're both true. Even though our finite human minds can't understand, this is perfectly reconciled into the infinitely higher mind of God and of Christ. And I think you say it well, this really doesn't affect us. We don't know who's elect and who's not. We're called to sow the seeds of the gospel, and this is all up to God. And he can defend himself, and he's perfectly just. We can trust in his perfect justice, that God is not going to judge anyone unjustly in the end.

Dr. Stephen Nichols is our guest today here on The Christian Worldview. We're talking about the Ligonier State of Theology survey. It's very interesting. And I've been asking him some hard questions here the last couple, some of the deeper theological issues. And it's not just to get an idea of what people believe but how to sharpen our own theology, our own understanding of who God is and how he operates.

Let's go to statement number 13, Steve. This is another difficult one that especially non-believers, doesn't sit well with them. And the statement is this, number 13. "Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation." What? You mean if I were to lie just once or to do just one little thing against God's law, I would deserve eternal damnation for that? That seems like a capricious, disproportionately punitive God. Well, the survey found that, this is all respondents, not just evangelicals here, 23% of all respondents agreed with that statement, "Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation," while 71%, a huge majority, disagreed with that statement. Why is that statement true, that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation? And is

there a way that Christians can better explain this so it makes a little more sense to the unbelieving mind? Or is it one of these things that the unbelieving mind can't understand the things of the Lord?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

Yeah, it might be a combination of the both, but here's a stab at it. I think we tend to not have the right standard when we think about sin and consequences and punishment and heaven. And so, as long as I'm basically good, God's this fatherly God, we'll be in heaven. There's certainly people in hell, but for the most part, good people are going to be in heaven and be good. And we do that by having each other as the standard. "Well, I'm not as bad as an axe murderer," or "I work hard, pay my taxes, raise a family." And we compare ourselves to other people. But that's not the standard. The standard is the holiness of God.

And so, let's go to Isaiah 6. Of course, this is Ligonier. So let's go to Isaiah 6. And here's Isaiah, who is a prophet, by the way, who could plead his case in the presence of God that he's a good guy and a righteous guy, even. But here he is, confronted with the standard. And what's his first reaction? "I need to be purged of my sin." And of course, our mouth reflects our sins, so "I need my lips purged." And so, this is the standard. Each other, other people, they're not the standard. And we tend to think of religion, when we get into religious thinking, especially Americans, they look at each other, "We're better than those people." But that's not the standard. It's God. One of my favorite R.C. quotes is, "Sin is cosmic treason." Intuitively, naturally, that's not how we think about it.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Yeah, very well said.

A couple more questions for you, Steve. Just one concluding statement here in the State of Theology survey. Ligonier says, "This survey makes clear that many evangelical churches and individuals lack a firm grasp of the essential Christian faith revealed in Scripture. The solution to this state of affairs is what it has always been: God's plan for Christian growth and discipleship within the context of doctrinally sound local churches. As biblically qualified pastors lead God's people in worship and the accurate exposition of God's Word on a regular basis, healthy growth among believers will take place as the Holy Spirit causes the Word to bear much fruit."

One more short paragraph. "Evangelical churches that do not prioritize sound doctrine and biblically qualified leaders who can accurately teach the Word will inevitably stray from the faith delivered once for all to the saints, exchanging truth for trends and substance for a superficial Christianity that bears little resemblance to what the Scriptures teach."

And boy, was that couple paragraphs very well said. So, Steve, what would be your exhortation to pastors and elders, or maybe just regular Christians in these churches, listening today to focus on the fundamentals of the faith rather than growth strategies and other things that local churches get so easily distracted by and don't give people who come to these churches what they really need in the discipleship and the sound preaching?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

I think going back to those paragraphs, there's no secret strategy here. We don't need to put our heads together and come up with a 10-step plan that will somehow get the church back into the minds of Americans, et cetera. God's plan is rather simple, and it is the church. It's that the church has been entrusted with the deposit of faith, as the New Testament writers call it, and that there's a succession plan, that Paul trained Timothy, and Timothy is to train faithful men, and those faithful men are also to train faithful men. And thankfully, we have a great succession in church history of gifted teachers who've given us reflections on scripture, commentaries, statements of faith. If we're members of faithful denominations, we have our denominational standards.

All of these are gifts to us, to the church today through the past 2,000 years. But at the center of all of it is the Bible. And at the center of all of it is our need to study God's Word. It's His gift to us. "Everything's in there we need for life and godliness," Peter tells us. So, that's really the plan. We don't have to overcomplicate it. We just have to, as you say, stick to the fundamentals and stick to the basics and simply, as Paul exhorted, preach the Word.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Stephen, Revelation 2, where Christ addresses the seven churches in Revelation there. The first church He addresses is the church at Ephesus. And He says this, "I know your deeds and your toil and your perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men. And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not. And you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake and have not grown weary." So there's a real positive report from Christ to the church at Ephesus. But then He says this, "But I have this against you that you have lost your first love."

Let me just try to interpret this, and correct me if I'm wrong, that He's saying that it's possible, very possible, to have sound theology in your mind and have discernment for what is right and wrong, but to have a heart that either wanders or doesn't love God as it should. So, the question is, how to be strong in doctrine and theology, as we're talking about today, to be discerning as well, but to have a heart that fully loves God and loves others?

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

Really appreciate that you brought that up. You probably don't have a more trained church than the church at Ephesus. You had Paul there for 18 months. You had John there. Timothy was there. This is just an amazing trained church. So, fascinating that you brought attention to this.

So, how do we who want to pursue sound theology, we think it's important and biblical, how do we not have that indictment against us that we've lost our first love? At the center of theology is not propositions and statements, and I'm not even going to say this, getting it right. At the center of theology is worshiping a person. One of the early definitions of theology is that theology is doxology, that to study God is to worship God. If we reduce theology to studying theology, we can very well risk losing our first love. But if we

remember that we learn about God so that we can know more of his depths, so that we can love Him with a greater love, serve Him with greater zeal and give Him praise and gratitude with fervency and consistency, and see that really our life is all about worship. That will keep that indictment at bay. And we'll never be accused of losing our first love. But theology is more than study, David. And I really appreciate that you brought this to the surface.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

It's just very well said. Yeah. I'm glad we discussed it. That's so important to guard our hearts, to know why we're studying theology, so that we can know God better and love him and obey Him more. So, very well said. Thank you for that, Steve.

Final question for you. And this is not about the survey. It's about R.C. Sproul. And you've written a book on him, R.C. Sproul: A Life, and we'd love to have you back on to talk more about that. You mentioned earlier, as R.C. was so well known for preaching about the holiness of God, you mentioned Isaiah 6. One of the highlights of my Christian life, was probably 20 years ago now, or maybe not quite that long, maybe 15 years ago, was hearing R.C. preach at a conference on Isaiah 6. And it was just the holiness of God, just memorable to this day. He went to heaven back on December 14th, 2017. So we're nearly coming up to the eight-year anniversary of his heaven going. I know his wife Vesta is still living. You wrote this book, this biography of him. I haven't read it yet. But maybe you can give us a teaser for when you come back on the program that what made R.C. Sproul such a unique man and preacher.

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

Well, there's all kinds of answers here, David. I think part of the answer is he was born in Pittsburgh. So, if you're from Pittsburgh, you know what that means. He would say, "You can take the man out of Pittsburgh, but you can't take Pittsburgh out of the man." But he was a great communicator. In the end, he was a brilliant student. But he really wasn't about impressing people with his academic prowess. He was focused on communicating to people. I've sat with sermons. I've been in conference. I've heard him on the radio, video. Whatever the medium is, you feel like he's talking directly to you. It's like he has the ability to get past whatever the crowd is and actually talk to you. And I think that's what made him so profoundly impactful. He really had a love for people.

And I remember asking Vesta one time, because R.C. would talk to anybody. And I remember asking her about it one time. And she said he would do that because he really thought he had something to learn from every single person he met. I just think if you put that together, the combination of just really caring about people and being engaged with people, but also being just a sterling communicator, and then on top of that, all the study that he did, was just a great gift to the 20th and early 21st century church.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Yes, very much. He just had that ability. Brilliant man, brilliant mind, of course, theologian, but had the ability to take the complex, very deep truths of Scripture and make them very understandable. And that was just a gift and, I'm probably sure, a skill, too, that he developed over time. Just so appreciate his impact on my life.

Steve, thank you for coming on The Christian Worldview radio program. We always enjoy having you on the program. Thank you for your time and all you're doing at Ligonier Ministries to proclaim sound theological truth and the gospel and what you're doing also at Reformation Bible College. Thank you again. And all of God's best and grace to you.

GUEST: DR. STEPHEN NICHOLS:

Oh, it's been my pleasure, David. Thank you for having me on the show.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

All right. If you missed any of the interview today or want to hear it again, just go to our website, TheChristianWorldview.org where there are also links to our guest, Stephen Nichols and the State of Theology survey. You can take the survey yourself if you'd like.

Now, what Steve said earlier in the segment about the point of theology being not just knowledge or getting it right but to know God better in order to love and worship Him more deeply. Now, earlier this week, I spoke at a Christian school chapel here in Minnesota on the purpose of life. We're going to play a short portion of that message now, because the point of sound theology and the purpose of life are the same, to love God with our whole being.

DAVID WHEATON Speaking Event Audio:

So, this is the issue that some of you here might be facing at this time in your life. You have believed the gospel, but the Christian life seems more like, "I have to, oh, ho-hum," rather than, "I get to," with an exclamation point and a smiling emoji after it. Being a Christian seems a little too stifling instead of an inexhaustible, exhilarating God to love, to serve, and to worship. This is exactly how the church in Ephesus had become.

If you ever read in Revelation 2, Christ had a message for these seven churches in Revelation. For Ephesus, He first complimented them on things they were doing well. They were kind of sound in doctrine, which is good. They were discerning, which is good. But something important, something all important was missing from this church. And here's what Jesus said. He said, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." You see, these Christians in Ephesus had lost track of the highest priority, the purpose of life, to love God, to love Christ, and He called them to repent.

And that is the first point. And we have three little summary points to conclude today, and that's the first one. If you have examined yourself and you think that you're not loving God as you ought, as He intends for you, repent. Confess it. Turn from it. Ask God to help you overcome it. Pray that God will help you to grow in your love for Him. That is a prayer that God will absolutely answer in your life. "Lord, help me to love You more." This is a prayer He will answer in your life because that is His will for you. This love for God is not just an emotion that we try to conjure up. This love is a settled conviction deep within us that reveres God above all else and seeks His will and ways over our own.

The second point on the purpose of life to love God is to regularly remind yourself of your purpose to love God. Have you ever noticed in the Bible how often the Bible used the word reminder? Like, "Stir yourselves up by way of reminder," or "Be reminded of this." Just as an athlete needs coaches in their life to remind you of the fundamentals of the sport and the strategies, we all need to be reminded of our call, our purpose to love God above all else. Satan, again, will deceive you away from this. Life will distract you away from this. Memorize what Jesus said. Recite it to yourself. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Memorize it. Now, of course, you're not going to love God perfectly. We know that. You're going to fall short. You won't arrive at that destination till heaven. But this is the direction you and I need to be heading each day.

As you read the Bible, remind yourself, "I have the incredible opportunity to hear directly from the One who created me and saved me." It's reading the Word of God, not just for information but to love the God of the Word. As you draw near to Him in His Word and in prayer, and begin to appreciate and know more about Him, your love will deepen for hHm because you'll realize just how worthy He is of your love and worship.

Point number three. We go from pray about it, to remind yourself to love the Lord, to number three, to choose to spend time with others who love God. Now, Jesus' message to another church in Revelation, the church of Laodicea, He had a very different message. They were lukewarm, and He said that He would spew them out of His mouth. They didn't love God. They were apathetic and really just a drag on everyone around them. But a hot Christian who loves God with all his being is contagious. He or she loves to discuss the things of God's Word, loves to obey God, loves to share the gospel with unbelievers, loves to be with other believers, loves to sing worship to God. Find and spend time with those kinds of people. It's contagious. We think about, we talk about, we spend time with, we spend money on what we love most. And you can tell what a person loves most by analyzing those things in their life. So seek out friends who love God first and foremost.

So, ask God to grow your love for hHm. Remind yourself that the purpose of life is to love and worship God, and do it frequently. And number three, choose friends who love God greatly. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." may the Lord give each one here the supernatural empowerment to do that purpose for each one of our lives.

HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Again, that was a portion of a chapel message at a Christian school here in Minnesota. And it's true, the purpose of life and the purpose of theology is to love God with our whole being. We're out of time today, but thank you for joining us on The Christian Worldview radio program and for your support of this nonprofit radio ministry.

Just a reminder that the upcoming December issue of *The Christian Worldview Journal* will be sent to everyone on our mailing list, even beyond the regular recipients who are Christian Worldview partners. So if

you'd like to get that issue, enter your mailing address at TheChristianWorldview.org, or give us a call at 888-646-2233.

Also, for Christian Worldview partners, consider using one of the articles in the November issue of the *Journal* on giving thanks and the Thanksgiving weekend radio program, which will be released this coming Wednesday as part of your Thanksgiving family time. Because the Bible says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Now, there's some good theology. Until next time, think biblically, live accordingly, and stand firm.

The mission of The Christian Worldview is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope today's broadcast encouraged you toward that end. To hear a replay of today's program, order a transcript, or find out what must I do to be saved, go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call toll-free 888-646-2233. The Christian Worldview is a listener-supported, nonprofit radio ministry furnished by The Overcomer Foundation. To make a donation, order resources, become a Christian Worldview partner, sign up for our weekly email or The Christian Worldview Journal monthly print publication, or to contact us, go to TheChristianWorldview.org, call 888-646-2233, or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. Thanks for listening to The Christian Worldview.