

A Biblical View of Sociology

By Mike Bizzell

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–17. Now read Daniel 1:1–7. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How do you avoid the influence of bad company? Read Colossians 2:8. Prepare to share a few ways society attempts to shape a person's thinking and behavior.

Assignment Two

Read the comments relating to “Sociological Perspectives” in the section **It's in the Book**. Also read Luke 6:46–49 and Matthew 12:43–45. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What happens to a society not built on the truth of Christ? What happens when we try to help people get better apart from Christ?

Assignment Three

Read Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:14–16; 22:37–40; 28:19–20. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How do these verses relate to your responsibility to work for the good of society?

Scripture to Memorize

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that society does not determine their behavior and that Christ's followers are called to work for the good of society.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine you move to a different country where Christianity is not the prevailing religion. Being an obvious minority, how will you respond to the negative stereotypes your new neighbors have of Christians? How will you respond to pressures to conform to the culture around you? Will the society shape you, or will you maintain your identity? Think of certain aspects of life where you might conform, as well as other aspects of life where you would never conform. What are some ways you might impact society in your new homeland?

Background: What Is Sociology?

Sociology is the study of human relationships and the institutions of society. The field is diverse, dealing with such topics as the family, gender roles, education, government, crowd behavior and religion. Sociology seeks to answer the questions concerning how individuals and societies are shaped and motivated.

Unfortunately, a common thread running throughout sociological theory is a belief in the power of society over the individual. "Social determinism" teaches that people are the product of their surroundings and often relieves people of responsibility for their actions. This philosophy sees society as the problem and the individual as a pawn or victim.

As a "science," sociology views man as no more than an animal. There is no room for an all-knowing, all-powerful God. Instead, sociology sees "god" as a concept fabricated by society to answer difficult questions. The men who pioneered the study of sociology believed social science would be able to bring people to a full understanding of themselves and the world. At that point, religion would just fade away.

Discussion Question

How does a person's view of mankind determine how he or she explains the behavior of others? Coming from a biblical worldview, what would you say is society's main problem?

Christ Followers Need Not Be like the Society around Them

Read Daniel 1:1–7 out loud.

Studying the Passage

In 605 BC, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem.

Verse 2. The Lord gave. Because of Israel's sins, God allowed the Babylonians to force the surrender of Jerusalem.

Verse 3. some of the people of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar took many of the brightest and best Israelite men back to Babylon. His intentions were to educate and resocialize these young men and turn them into good Babylonian citizens.

Verse 7. gave them names. These men had their biblical Hebrew names changed to names that connected them to Babylonian gods. This was logical because the Babylonians expected their captives to switch their allegiance to Babylonian deities.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share a report.

Discussion Question

Why do you think the Babylonians took the brightest and best to Babylon? Do you think the captives found the Babylonian ways easy or difficult to resist? Why?

On Your Own

In the space below, write a list of behaviors or attitudes you exhibit that you believe are a result of being American. Next, make a list of behaviors or attitudes you believe you possess as a result of being a follower of Christ. Is there anything on one list that contradicts something on the other list?

Studying the Passage

Verse 8. Daniel resolved. Daniel's decision not to defile himself was made once and for all. The decision was not up for daily debate. Daniel would not compromise his faith.

Verse 15. Better in appearance. Daniel's decision to follow God rather than the forces of society paid off. He and his three friends were healthier than those who ate the king's food.

Discussion Question

What are some practical ways you can avoid being defiled by the society you live in?

Background

Sociologists espouse three different perspectives on what drives society:

1. One theory says that society is organized around and driven by what works. Institutions such as the family, education and religion exist because they meet a human need.
2. Another theory states that society is fueled by constant conflict over power and resources. Change occurs because competing groups force it.
3. The most recent societal theory states that society is shaped and reshaped as individuals interpret and reinterpret reality and pass that interpretation on to others. As perceptions change, so does society.

None of these theories embrace the biblical concept of sin. All of the theories perceive truth as relative and defined by the prevailing attitudes of the majority. Such perspectives directly contradict the Bible. Read and discuss John 14:6 and 17:17.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share a report.

Christ Followers Are Called to Seek the Good of Society

Read Matthew 22:38-40 and 28:18-20 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Most sociologists believe society needs to be made better and are seeking ways to accomplish the task. As Christ's followers we agree that our society is flawed and broken.

Verse 22:39. You shall love your neighbor. God has called us to make society better through truly loving people. **as yourself.** Such love places the good of others beyond our own and thus often leads to sacrifice.

Verse 28:19. make disciples. God also has called us to make society better through introducing people to Christ and then discipling new believers until they, too, become disciple makers. Only the transformation of many hearts will cause society to change on a large scale.

Read Jeremiah 29:4-7 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 4. Thus says the Lord. God spoke through Jeremiah in a letter to the exiles in Babylon less than ten years after Daniel's arrival.

Verses 5–6. Build . . . plant . . . Take wives. Jeremiah told the people to settle down in Babylon. They were to raise families and buy land and build houses.

Verse 7. Seek the welfare of the city. The exiled Jews were instructed to pray for and seek the welfare of the land they were in.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may share a report.

Discussion Question

How could seeking the welfare of a pagan city benefit followers of Christ living in that city?

On Your Own

Take a few moments to write at least three ways you and your church can seek to improve the welfare of your city, consistent with Scripture and bringing glory to God.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Sociology is the study of human relationships. Sociology attempts to determine how people relate in various settings and how to improve society. Although sociologists have done a good job of describing what people do, they are unable to address the root issues of human interaction because they deny the reality of God.

The fathers of sociology trusted science so much that they predicted the demise of religion. They focused on the brokenness of society while denying the sinfulness of man (Romans 3:23). Sociological theory generally states that individuals would be fine if it were not for the forces of society acting on them. This view is often taken to the extreme and used to justify sinful acts of individuals.

Scripture acknowledges that our surroundings affect us for both evil (2 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Corinthians 6:17) and for good (Hebrews 10:24–25; 1 Corinthians 4:16). The Bible also reminds us that we will be held accountable for our individual actions (Romans 14:12).

We see in the account of Daniel and his friends that God's people are called to resist the influences of society and hold fast to their faith and practice (Daniel 1:1–17). When Daniel made up his mind to refuse the king's diet, he followed through and was blessed by God. Daniel continued throughout his life to resist the pressures of a pagan society and remained true to God (Daniel 6).

Lest we be tempted to condemn society and withdraw from it, we must remember that God has called us to "seek the welfare of the city" in which He has placed us (Jeremiah 29:7). We are called to love people, seek justice and care for the vulnerable in the name of Christ (Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8).

Ultimately, we invite others to meet Jesus and have their hearts transformed by His Word and in the power of His Spirit. When this happens on a large scale, society is genuinely transformed.

Conclusion:

- God's Word, not the consensus of society, is the source of truth.
- Society may pressure you, but Jesus calls you to make your own choices.
- You are called to make society a better place by obeying Christ.

Follow up Question

Who or what determines who you are and what you do?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.