

Worldview

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:23-24).

In these two hugely underappreciated verses, Paul is instructing us to live out a biblical worldview. OK, he doesn't use the word, but worldview is what he has in mind. We're to jettison the old, secular (or pagan) worldview that controlled us before we believed in Christ, and to form a totally new one from the Scriptures. Most American Christians simply have a veneer of biblical religion hiding their old, natural self. So we either react to or form *ad hoc* opinions regarding everything that comes along in life. What our text says is that we should instead have a “grid” already formulated and tightly installed in our minds whereby we evaluate everything and then respond in a previously thought through, biblical or theological manner.

Because we face complex and difficult issues in today's American life, and because an increasingly godless polyvalent culture assaults us, and because bizarre political news confronts us almost daily, we simply *must* have a thorough-going Christian worldview in place and in control. We need to have “the mind of Christ.” In Christ, we are “a new creation,” so we are to have radically different thinking, values and behaviors than unbelievers. Paul's admonition here, essentially, is to think biblically about the issues of life, and then to live out our lives accordingly. And we only can do that if we know what that “new self” looks like. So, let's think about worldviews.

Everyone has a worldview. It's our view regarding, or attitude toward, everything we encounter in life. So, medicine and health; animals and the whole world of nature; law and business, politics and government; recreation and entertainment; work, money and debt; war; science; marriage, abortion, homosexuality; other religions – all these (and more) are the subjects of a worldview. A worldview is based on certain necessary presuppositions, such as our understanding of God, and how can we know (anything). And who or what determines what's right/wrong and how we should live. We all hold presuppositions about where we came from, how we got here, and where we're going. We aren't aware of our presuppositions in thinking about things; they are hidden from our consciousness, but they're there.

Everyone has presuppositions about God: He exists, or He does not exist. (By referring here to God, I mean the One who has revealed Himself in Scripture, and not a humanist or pantheist deity, nor the Muslim or Mormon deity, nor a Deist kind of God.) The presupposition that God exists leads to – or *should* lead to – a worldview that holds that He created, that He revealed Himself to us, that there are absolutes, that He redeems, and that He judges. And that He has authority over us! This is the great issue in forming a worldview: What shall be the authority that determines how we think and how we are and what we do? The authority is either God thru His revelation, the Bible, or it's us.

The unbeliever's authority is himself. He will analyze every circumstance, he will reason thru every issue, he will decide what's right or not, and etc. If each individual doesn't do this personally, as we go thru life we absorb a worldview that's based on such human authority. The believer's authority is God. As Creator and sovereign Ruler of His creation, He has the right to determine what kind of people we are, what we're to think, what we're to do, and how we're to live – and to enforce it. At its core, the issue is whether man is autonomous, as the Serpent deceitfully suggested in the Garden, or man is dependent on God. Having been delivered from the domain and power of that evil One, believers should humbly and lovingly be looking to God for instruction.

So now, worldviews. But first, some basics. We are in the world, necessarily, but we're not “of the world.” This means we are going to be different than unbelievers in most aspects of life. We're going to have to train our minds to distinguish between what is “worldly” and what is biblical. That means searching the Scriptures, reflecting on them, and deriving practical life applications from them. This takes time (years probably), and it may require the combined effort of others who are like-minded. And the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church to enable our sanctification, so His empowerment should help us form a worldview. We're also going to need courage to live out what our worldview demands, and not compromise or abandon it. Also, we need to discipline our minds to think about God all the time. God is relevant to every aspect of reality. There's no such dichotomy as “sacred vs secular.” Nor is there such a dichotomy as “public vs private.” Our Christianity is to be expressed *all the time*, not just when we're in Church meetings on Sundays. One more basic: it's the Bible that we use to construct a Christian worldview, and not anything else. That means we have to know it, spend time in it, and think through what it says. We use reason to understand its application, not as a substitute for it.

A worldview deals with character. What kind of person are we to be? Our character isn't determined by our genes, nor by society, nor by our friends. We determine it, and we're responsible for it. The New Testament teaches that Christ is our model. We're to be like Him. So we need to understand from the Bible what Christ was like and determine to be just like Him. In Sunday school lessons over the years, we've looked again and again at the beautiful and perfect Person of Christ. We've seen His humility, His grace, His total selflessness, His self-sacrificing love for others (even the unlovely), His submission and obedience to the will of the Father, His determination to bless others super-generously, His embrace of weakness and suffering, His holiness, His desire to be in communion thru prayer with the Father, His purposefulness in life and sense of mission, His use of Scripture to deal with issues thrust at Him . . . in all these and in other ways that emerge from the Gospels we're to be exactly like Him.

A worldview deals with values. One of the highest things we value is human life. Created in the image of God, every single person has utmost value and dignity. We don't demean anyone, however depraved or evil that person may be. We eschew gossip; and we refrain from cursing others, instead we make allowances for the faults and failures of others. We don't value certain ones more than others, such as super-intelligent ones, or wealthy ones, or super-achieving ones; nor do we devalue certain ones, such as those who are mentally deficient, or are low in caste, or are from certain nationalities, or those with ideas and beliefs not our own. We therefore eschew ideologies that devalue individual lives for the good of the society. We likewise abhor willful euthanasia and abortion. We support medical interventions that seek to preserve or maintain life. We find not only slavery but any activity that uses people as means to aggrandize ourselves an abomination. And we despise warfare.

We value not only human life, but all life, for God is the author of life. We therefore eschew hunting for sport. We support efforts to maintain threatened species and avoid the extinction of species. We don't kill snakes or wasps or sharks or tigers just because they're there and not threatening us. We eat meat because God has permitted it and we may need to, but we don't kill animals wantonly. God loves his animal creatures too.

We value work. When God created us, He gave us work to do. We're to bless others; our work should be doing what benefits others. A young person's choice of a career should be based on what serves others. As our work is unto the Lord, it should be done carefully and joyfully. We're also to serve God as priests, mediating the needs of others to God thru intercessory prayer and mediating the salvation God offers in the Gospel to others. The high value that work has tempers the importance of leisure. All that we do should be evaluated carefully for whether it has a godly purpose or is self-indulgent. (Likewise, all that we *have* – wealth, time, gifts, whatever – God has entrusted to us to use for His purposes, not selfishly.)

We value truth and knowledge. God gave us the Scripture so that we would know Him and know certain spiritual truths that can only be known by revelation. Therefore we study theology, because to know theology is to know truth. To the extent that science seeks to discover truths that God embedded in the natural world, especially those that bring benefit to humanity, it's a legitimate and godly pursuit. Any pursuit of knowledge that seeks to exalt itself over God is idolatrous. As finite creatures, we're limited in what truths we can discover apart from Scripture, therefore we must understand epistemology and with humility accept what cannot be known; speculations and imaginings about the unknowable may have a limited role but don't substitute for true knowledge. Because God has spoken, there are knowable absolutes; we eschew any notions that truth and/or morality is relative to circumstances or to societal beliefs or personal opinion.

A biblical worldview provides the grid or framework by which we can understand current events. God is at work in the world, fulfilling His holy agenda, and we can know what that is from the Word. So we need to grasp history as the Bible pre-writes it. A worldview also deals with action. It prescribes what we do, what we say, how we live. It will address human sexuality, the world of entertainment, participation or enjoyment of art and music, our personal relationships with others, the use of technology – in short, everything in life. A worldview is all-encompassing. What we've undertaken above barely begins to form a comprehensive Christian or biblical worldview.

“. . . be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). **“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”** (Colossians 3:2). God has identified Himself with His Word. Readers therefore are encouraged to think deeply about the Bible and to translate those thoughts into a consistent, Bible-based lifestyle. That way, our lives become a living expression of the Word of God, which expresses the mind and character of Christ. And that glorifies God, which is the goal and purpose of our existence.